

PAC-12 Women's Basketball Media Day

Thursday, October 20 2016

Mike Neighbors

Kelsey Plum

Chantel Osahor

Washington Huskies



stopped and they say, do you know Chantel? And I'm like, yeah, sometimes I do, you know? But her video went absolutely viral. They had just walked out and said we got 50 views in a minute when you were doing the little like Tron thing. So it just shows it's still going.

Q. Kelsey, you mentioned improving your game from last season to this season. What specifically have you done?

KELSEY PLUM: First off, I've put a lot more range on my shot. I don't think I'll ever get there. I'm actually a horrible half-court shooter. Horrible. I leave that to Chantel. So putting range on my shot. Going right. It's gotten better over the years, but it's nowhere near my left. Pretty sure everyone in the room knows that, and that's okay. But I'm working on it. Finishing around the rim more consistently, you know, there's a lot of times last year where I'd get there and maybe get fouled. But I could have gotten the extra point. So that's definitely an emphasis on this year.

But as far as on the defensive end, my rebounding. I can definitely help Chantel get in there. She's a warrior on the boards, and she needs help. So that's my job. I've got to get in there. Being able to get the defensive rebounds and start the transition break, that's one of my strengths, of being able to get in transition, find my team, find shooters on the wings. That's what's going to help us push leads and stuff like that. So that's been an emphasis. My range and my shot, defensive rebounding, finishing my right-hand with contact.

Q. You guys playing together now for four years. I want each of you to talk about what the other one does to make you better, and just kind of you're both left-handed, you're both kind of quirky. Just your relationship together and why it works so well?

KELSEY PLUM: One of the reasons I love Chantel so much is because she's extremely honest with me. She will stop and say, I mean, anything from that was a bad shot to that is not a cute outfit. You need people like that in your life because especially now that I've been able to have success so far, people tell you what you want to hear and she doesn't. She'll tell you straight up. That's something that I've really learned to just appreciate and value, and I look for it.

On the court, she's absolutely a warrior, and you can't

MIKE NEIGHBORS: Thanks for having us. You all look so relaxed and very San Francisco out there. Very high tech. Thanks for having us. Excited to be here, obviously, with these two and not practicing today. We've had some great ones, but we needed a day off, so thanks for having us.

Q. You guys set a really high bar for yourself reaching the Final Four last year. How did it change your approach this season? How do you think your preparation for the season is different this year than it might have been in previous years?

CHANTEL OSAHOR: Without being blunt, I'm just going to be blunt. I'm over it. I've moved on. So my preparation, I've prepared the same way I've prepared personally for every other year. Gone back to the drawing board. Kind of looked at what I needed to get better at. Reflected on -- that's probably the nicest water bottle I've seen in a long time. Kind of just reflecting on what I needed to get better at as a player, as a leader and as a person moving forward and looking to this year. Go about the journey the same way I did the previous years.

Q. I fully expect that you're over it, but we're not, and we have to talk about it. And to start with you, since you gave us nothing on that last little bit but a shrug, how much fun were you able to have in the run last year? And specifically to you, and I need an answer, what was it like when all of a sudden your flat-footed shot that we've all been marvelling at for years went viral?

CHANTEL OSAHOR: Well, first, it was fun. Playing with my team and having the time of our lives was very fun. The video was a little overwhelming. It was great. I mean, I love it. But it's just literally everywhere I walked it was, oh, my God, are you the girl that shoots without jumping? And it's like, maybe. Maybe I am. I don't know. But it's been a cool ride. It's been fun. I like it.

KELSEY PLUM: Just to put it in perspective, I get

put a price on that. I don't care if we're playing UConn, I don't care if we're playing Notre Dame at Notre Dame or Stanford at Stanford. I know Chantel Osahor is going to give everything she's got and she's going to fight. Going into a game, I know I have a warrior. That bond is fueled over years. It takes time. It takes chemistry. It takes fights. It takes crying. It takes literally blood, sweat and tears to get there. So just that genuine love and respect for each other has brought us to a point in our relationship where that's my sister. And for anything I'll do for her.

CHANTEL OSAHOR: I can't really beat that. But with Kelsey there's no other person I'd rather play with my by side. No other person. The one thing that she's given me that I've never really said to her is just confidence in my own game. There's times I've just been like why am I here? If not for her, I don't know if I'd be here. So Kelsey means everything to me on and off the court. Our off-court relationship by far means more to me by far than our on court relationship. Our relationship will last a lifetime. She'll probably be at my wedding, so, yeah.

Q. Mike, Kelsey's going to crush the Pac-12 scoring record this year. I think it's interesting that Kelsey said my right's nowhere near my left, as we all know, and yet people have not been able to come up with an answer for her throughout her career. What is special about the way Kelsey has developed over her career?

MIKE NEIGHBORS: She can go right. But just going left for her, if they don't stop the going left part, she'll be fine. She'll figure out that part. Whenever somebody does figure out how to take away the left at the next level or wherever, she'll figure it out. Practice of practice from her freshman year to where she's at now, she knew what to do back then. Now she knows why you do things. There's been countless moments of the last, specifically the last year and a half, to where you just get out of -- and I speak to them both of their ways. You let them do what they do. You don't get in the way. There was the example this summer in Australia. There was a play that we didn't even have in our playbook yet, but as they told one of my assistant coaches, remind me there was a timeout to draw this play up so we can run it in the fourth quarter because it's going to work. Well, she called it out on the fly, going down the court. Hey, y'all remember this play from last year? We ran it, and it worked. So she knows why we do things. The game continues to evolve because she's never satisfied. It's still a work in progress. She's motivated every day to be her best, not worrying about being the best, but to be her best.

Q. Congratulations on a great year last year. Mike, is it too early to ask you what the stats are your

returning players, and what the stats on some of the scouting reports that you have might indicate what you might be able to do this year?

MIKE NEIGHBORS: Stats?

Q. Your charts.

MIKE NEIGHBORS: You know, we've already started charting our lineup efficiencies. We've got some new faces. We've got three huge roles to fill that we lost. Obviously, Talia Walton's impact. But if anybody out there is looking past what Alexis Atchley did for us over the course of her career, and also what Mathilde Gilling did, they're not paying close enough attention, and we've got to have somebody fill those. Got 100% confidence these guys are going to do their thing, and Katie Collier in our returners. But there are question marks, and those are immensely valuable roles that have to be filled. We've been starting in practice, starting to chart those lineups to see who is going to get the first shot at it, and then the next shot, and the next shot, and the next shot. We've got to get it right quick, because we've got the preseason NIT gets tough really fast. So we're having to do a little more of that in the preseason and not count our games. But, no, it's not too early. I don't have an answer for you yet. I don't know who we'd start tomorrow if we had to play a game, other than the two here and Katie.

Q. What changed for Washington women's basketball in the last six months? And does the national picture seem more wide open this year and does that seem fun?

MIKE NEIGHBORS: I'll answer it backwards. I think the national picture is more open because we haven't anointed UConn, rightfully so, like we have in the past. I think it is wide open. I think there are four Final Four spots up. There are eight Elite Eights, and Sweet 16 spots wide open. So I think being in the conversation is fun. Being talked about it fun. Knowing that we have the right pieces to get back there if we can put it into a puzzle.

As far as Washington changing, the reach. People answer the phone a little bit more quickly than they used to, and they respond to emails and social media things. But nothing's really changed around the practice gym. Kelsey talking about moving on, I was wearing our Final Four ring when we were out recruiting and in home visits, she told me to take it off. Put it away. I thought that was very poignant, and I did. And you won't see me wear it again, because it's time to move on. And we do want to reflect. We want to be respectful and honor what happened. And when they drop the banner, we'll clap. But I can guarantee you, there has not been one second spent on focusing back. We had great memories. We have some of the coolest videos you've ever seen that we'll be able to

play at Chantel's wedding reception, if I get an invite. But she's hopefully going to be on my coaching staff around that time. I don't know. I'm already working on that. But anyhow. There's been positive changes, but nothing's hopefully going to be visible to how we go about doing things.

Q. There was a video that came out a couple weeks ago of you hitting 145 straight free throws. Is that your personal record? And for Chantel and Mike, have you seen anything like it, and what are your personal records?

KELSEY PLUM: No, that's not my personal record, but it was a record that when people were watching, I've done more about it myself. But it's interesting, because I was really feeling it until he brought the band down. It wasn't necessarily the band, it was just me laughing at the band that got me to miss that free throw.

CHANTEL OSAHOR: I've never seen anything like that. That was awesome.

MIKE NEIGHBORS: Not in a practice setting like that where it was a drill. It was one of our free throw drills that we've been doing now that we've got a full team. And we ran out of time to do it. We still had half the practice left to go or I probably wouldn't have brought the band in. We would have seen how far it would have gone. But I think both of these kids know it's hard to continue to challenge them in some ways, so I wanted to see if she could do it with the band there. I'm going to keep trying to find ways. You have to be creative to challenge these guys, and the band luckily came through that day. But I've never seen anything in a practice like it. I think she would have made 500 if I hadn't brought the band out. It was just pure -- she had only made 14 in a row. She didn't bring this part up. We had several rotations. She made 14 her first time and 14 the next. I was on her a little bit. And she usually does stuff like that when you point out something like that.

The next day she made 39 straight shots in practice from the floor. 39 for her first 39. Didn't miss a shot for 43 minutes of practice.

KELSEY PLUM: Well, let me back up here. We start practice and he goes, hey, just to let you know, we charted this drill yesterday and you were last.

MIKE NEIGHBORS: She was next to last. I forgot we had a player.

KELSEY PLUM: I was like, I'm sorry. Because I go in there and take the hardest shot and everything. And I was like, you know what? No. Okay. I was last. So every time in practice when we were shooting, I make a shot and look over and said you chart that? You chart

that? You get that one? So I think after about --

MIKE NEIGHBORS: 39.

KELSEY PLUM: He kind of got what I was saying. Okay, you want to chart it, let's chart it. So I'm glad I've moved up the ladder now.

MIKE NEIGHBORS: We didn't actually chart. That day didn't count. That was a non-chart day.

Q. Since you know her so well, your thoughts on Adia Barnes and the challenge she has at Arizona?

MIKE NEIGHBORS: 100% confidence that she'll do it. She's one of my most trusted friends. There's no question that she'll figure it out. It's a hard job. This is a hard league to catch anybody. It's really, really hard. But she knows how to build relationships with people, and that's what this game is all about. I don't know how long it's going to take and maybe this year. There is no question in my mind that she has everything she needs to start to catch people. I just hope it's not us.

Q. I have a question, just talk about Adia. You actually lost two staff members and both head coaches. How has that impacted your staff and what you're doing with the team this year?

MIKE NEIGHBORS: It made for a little bit of a busier summer, but both of those people wanted to be head coaches, and I think it's a huge part of my job because people helped me learn along the way. That's the necessary part. I thought we were going to lose everybody. I really thought we were going to lose Morgan too. So I was prepared to lose everybody. With that said, fortunately we had Australia. Had we not had the trip to Australia to get the new staff in to start the process, it would be really, really hard. It's a challenge every day. They don't know our terminologies. They don't know everything about how quirky I am around the office. But they're great people. Jasmine Lister, and Todd Schaefer, three years from now we'll be talking about them like we do Adia and Fred. But this group's been very receptive to them. It's hard to earn these kids' respect because the two people we lost were great. But we'll get there, just like I think we will. It may be April again, but I think the team will come together and have 100% confidence.

We lost Jackie Nared too, and that's a huge blow because she had really become an older sister type to these kids, and that's something I'm not very good at being. But we have Jenn Wassom in, and then Tracy. Everybody came in and got a little piece of what was going on.

Q. Kelsey, how many free throws have you made in a row by yourself? And when was that?

KELSEY PLUM: This summer I was by myself. 250-something. It was around there. But, yeah.

Q. Mike, Charlie said that filling out the ballot, doing the picks this year was the toughest she can remember, trying to figure out who was going to finish where and make those predictions. Is that an experience you share?

MIKE NEIGHBORS: Yes. I mean, when you have to put a team beside the No. 9, you're going, wait, that team's really good. But somebody's got to be 9th. It's a testament to the league and what it's become. But it was by far the hardest. I think you could have done a lot of different scenarios and it would have been equally as hard. I think it's going to be the same way, I think, trying to do this national poll. Talking about the wide openness.

I think a key injury or a key unexpected player playing better than we think could change a 9th place team to a second place team very, very easily.

Q. While your statistical strategy to help the conference heighten its RPI clearly worked last year in many ways. There were some people who were grumbling as well. But before you guys made it to the Final Four, did you get maybe some calls from some of those people afterwards or have you had any calls from people wondering what can we do that's similar to what you did or asking you for advice?

MIKE NEIGHBORS: Yeah, we had eight different leagues call and ask for the research study and none of them got it. They can do their own research and their own homework. The research was just data. It took 11 coaches, 12 coaches to do it, and do the scheduling and buy into that. It was a two-year process to be able to turn our schedules around. So collecting the data was the easy part. The hard part was the coaches, we all did it together. We all sat in that room knowing that we wanted to make deep runs in the tournament, and that was where the change came from. And the fact that all 11 coaches did it was the most amazing part to me. And that they did it for the good of the league. Obviously, the people that were -- I read that the blog or where they were talking about where we jobbed the system and weren't that good. Obviously I don't think anybody -- nobody called me to listen to me gloat, I don't think. But I think we proved it on the court. Our entire league did. I think it's going to be even stronger this year. I think the gap between one and two could be even greater than it was last year at Christmas.

Q. You have so many more available players this year than you've had in the last two years. How does that affect your practice system, if at all?

MIKE NEIGHBORS: We've had to use multiple goals and shoot on both ends for the first time. There are some shooting drills that we can't do half court-wise anymore. I don't know that it will affect our rotations on the court. I've been asked that question a lot. We're going to play the lineups that give us the best chance to win. And if that's eight or nine people, so be it. If it's six or five, that's what it will be. But it won't change the way we go about practice. We've had to go a little bit longer than I anticipated. I've caught it already early going a little longer than I thought just to get reps in. There are dates Kelsey doesn't feel as tired as she has in the past, so we've got to get better at that. So it's going to be a work in progress, I think, through the preseason. Once we get in season, we'll have it figured out. But I'm not telling you I've had it down pat through 12 practices yet. I'm glad we have 18 more.

Q. After the trip to Australia and your seniors next to you, what excited you about this team?

MIKE NEIGHBORS: Their possibilities to leave a legacy that they'll be proud to come back to as alums. They've already done a lot of great things. But the final chapter is always what people will remember. The things they're doing off the court, the way they've embraced the city, the way the city has embraced them, seeing graduation is going to be bittersweet, but I'm looking forward to that because they've given us everything we could have asked for out of them when they came in as a recruiting class. I've got a picture on my phone the day these two showed up on campus together. And to see them sitting up here today now, I saw somebody snapping a picture, which I'll go find, it's been fun to watch them come together and hear them talk about each other. That's where you know the paycheck comes in coaching when you hear them. Because as freshmen, I'd have to be sitting between them, just so you know for the record. I'd have to be sitting on the couch between them. They wouldn't be sitting up there. So they've come to grow to love each other, and it's fun to see that stuff.

It's fun to be around our kids. If y'all didn't see that last year and know that they were fun to be around, you ought to be there every day. It's a unique atmosphere, and we talked about it. It's a cool vibe. We don't even try to define it. We just make sure we still keep it, and have it. And we keep challenging each other. Both of those guys sat me down and challenge me to do some things this year that's outside of my comfort zone. And I listened to them. I'm not going to talk about it. That's between us.

But they challenge me. If I expect them to do hard things and be out of their comfort zone, then I have to too. I'm not very good at it yet, but I'm trying to get better at it every day.

Q. (Indiscernible)?

MIKE NEIGHBORS: No, but I am eating better. Chantel helped me. She's keeping on me and making sure I'm on top of that. I'm kind of growing up. I'm actually moving out of my condo and into a house today. So hopefully the movers are moving me, and I'm all grown up. I'm a big grown up.

Q. That means you can have the guards and the forwards at the same time?

MIKE NEIGHBORS: That's right. I don't have to cook on separate nights.

Q. My question for Kelsey, when he's talking about freshman year, I'm wondering if you recall the first time you saw Chantel's kind of unconventional shot and what you thought of it?

KELSEY PLUM: I very vividly remember the first time I played Chantel. We were in an AAU game at Mater Dei in Santa Ana, California. We were in the main gym. It was a big-time tournament we were playing in. And I remember her team, if you guys ever watched, her club team was really good. They had seven Division I players all played really well together, moved the ball well. They were just a really good team. Our team was oh, you know, we were a high school team. So we get out there, we start playing, and I very vividly remember Chantel's being guarded by one of our post players. Our coach is back up, back up. Like help inside the paint. Chantel hit whack, whack, whack, four threes in a row. Like within the course of the game. And I finally looked at my coach, my high school coach who is still one of my best friends. I said, hey, we still going to back up? What's going on here? They beat us by 20-plus. But, yeah, I absolutely remember that. I do remember when she committed. She committed without even taking a visit, so that was something that she committed before I did. So that was a part of it too.

Q. Chantel, why do you commit without taking a visit?

KELSEY PLUM: It's all about my faith. I'm a big believer in my faith. I just kind of prayed about it. It just felt right. That's all I can tell you. It was the best decision, so it worked out.

MIKE NEIGHBORS: I hadn't told Coach McGuff that I offered her a scholarship. I'm not sure she even knows 100% of the story yet. But he hadn't seen her play yet, and I had lucked into seeing her play in Chicago. Had a moment much like Kelsey. And called her once. We talked for -- Chantel's not a big phone talker. It was a short conversation, and then within a couple weeks later she was calling back asking if she could commit. I of course said absolutely. This is awesome. I had to go tell Kevin, hey, we got a commitment from a kid that you're going to really, really like. And he did, obviously.

But her faith is inspiring to all of us. Obviously, it takes a lot of faith to make a jump like that in this crazy world of recruiting.