

Pac-12 Women's Basketball Media Day

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TARA VANDERVEER: First of all, it's great to see everyone. We are very excited about our upcoming season. I feel like we've kind of started it, and then it got put on hold. We took our team to Italy. We had a great trip. It's hard to believe -- even Larry Scott said to me, Brittany's been playing forever at Stanford. It's hard to believe Brittany's a senior.

We're really excited about Brittany's senior year and Kaylee Johnson's senior year, and Alanna being a junior.

So we have a great group. We're playing a very competitive schedule, and we're very, very excited.

Q. For Brittany and Alanna. Can you talk about coming off a Final Four appearance and what that experience does for you and what it does to springboard you into the next season?

BRITTANY MCPHEE: I think going to the Final Four and getting a taste for it left us returners wanting more. We want to go back and we want to go further. I think that's kind of a drive for us. And I think we're trying to create that culture for our freshmen, too.

ALANNA SMITH: Yeah, and just kind of seeing what it takes from last year to get to the Final Four, because those seniors have gone their freshmen year, but everybody else had never been. So to get the experience and figure out just how much work is put into it.

Q. Alanna, where is the rebounding going to come from without Bird McCall?

ALANNA SMITH: I think that the rest of our post players, after watching Bird and the success that she had with her game, I think she's set a really good example for post players at Stanford to come.

So I know for a fact that I'm trying to emulate Bird as a player. And as a rebounder, I know Kayl does an awesome job on the boards, and the rest of our post players would do a great job too. We all look up to



former players from Stanford, and they do a fantastic job of showing the way.

Q. Britt, where's the three-point shooting going to come from without Karlie Samuelson?

BRITTANY MCPHEE: I think it's going to come from a lot of different players. A lot of people got to play in Italy, and they did super well. It's kind of there for the taking because she obviously was phenomenal.

But it should be exciting. I think we have great three-point shooters on our team, and we'll be fine.

Q. I'm wondering the impact of having so many of your former players on the WNBA, Ros Gold being a fantastic media representation. What's that mean to your program, all three of you? How does that feel seeing Ogwumike in the Finals again?

TARA VANDERVEER: As a coach, it makes me really proud. I hope it inspires some of our young players to work hard and be like some of the great players that are setting that great example.

BRITTANY MCPHEE: Yeah, in our locker room we have a wall of the past All-Americans, and we have a wall of some great players. It's just an example of what hard work can do. It's also a resource. I talked to plenty of alumni who have helped me out along the way and are just really good sources to go to.

ALANNA SMITH: Yeah, I think it sets a culture in our program and sets an expectation for us to do really well and work really hard to get there. Because I know after talking to players in the WNBA from Stanford that it did take hard work. I think it's really good for us to see them getting the reward from it.

Q. Tara, last year you said that your defense was kind of the thing that you hung your hat on. During the year you called your team one of the most committed defensive teams you've ever had. Have you been able to see an identity for this team yet? If so, how would you characterize it?

TARA VANDERVEER: I was waiting for that because one of our best defenders graduated too, Briana Roberson. Our defense is going to be, I think, something that our team will hang its hat on. We just haven't gotten to that point yet. We've worked really hard on -- I think offense takes longer to teach and

learn, so we've focused a lot during the summer in going for our trip in Italy. But we will get right to kind of the defensive things that we want to do.

But a lot of it starts with the leadership of your team. Someone like Briana or Karlie and Britt and Alanna, they buy into playing great defense, and they're going to work really hard.

I think the advantage that I have is the fact that these are girls working in the gym and getting extra time. They know in order for us to have a great season, they're going to have to play at both ends of the court. When you have your best offensive players playing defense, that gives you a really good chance.

Q. I want to ask you two questions. One, your chemistry, you talked about that a lot last season. You didn't have one superstar. It was really the entire team that bought in. But I think you have a chance to have a couple starters here. How is this team different from last year? I know it's an evolving thing, but what do you see right now?

TARA VANDERVEER: Well, I hope that the team chemistry -- it's different. Obviously you have different people and different players. But I think Alanna and Britt and Kayl, the leaders of our team, have to realize that chemistry was a big reason why our team was successful.

People are unselfish, and they're very hard workers. If they do that, I think that gives us a chance. We'll have different stars every night. It's not going to be maybe -- might not be the same person. But we have some great talent on our team, including, obviously, the two that are with me today.

But I think we're going to be a win by committee. It's going to be different people doing different things. Some of the little things and doing the behind-the-scene things.

So I'm counting on great chemistry and great leadership and the things that helped us be successful last year.

Q. Every team loses players each year at graduation. But you lost a very important staff member in Amy Tucker. How is it with the players having a new coach? Because you don't have a lot of turnover at Stanford, how is it for you, too, Tara?

ALANNA SMITH: Yeah, our new assistant coach, Lindy La Rocque, has fit in wonderfully. I mean, Lindy was a former player at Stanford. So she knows the ins and outs. She's now on the other side coaching.

I think that's actually really cool to be able to have a

former player who knows both sides. She's been great so far. I'm really looking forward to the years to come with Lindy. I'm really excited she's decided to come back to Stanford.

BRITTANY MCPHEE: Yeah, without Amy it was super weird. When we went to Italy and played without her on the bench, it was definitely an adjustment. But Lindy fits right in. It's always great to get a different perspective. She has a lot of great ideas, and it's fun to work with her.

TARA VANDERVEER: As far as I think it's going to be really hard for Amy the very first game, not to want to just yell: Hey, Tara, get out of that press, or put so-and-so in, or whatever. But, you know I think with basketball Amy feels really good about her contributions to the Stanford program. She was part of a lot of these players that are on our team.

The thing that I think we'll miss the most is she was just a quick thinker. When things happened in the game, I might still be mad about the foul, and she's moved on to like, hey, this is a play we've got to run.

So I think this will give an opportunity to other people. We're all going to have to step up our game.

Q. You're starting the season playing against two of the toughest teams in the nation in Ohio State and UConn. What are the advantages of starting out with such competition, and what are things other teams may shy away from?

TARA VANDERVEER: I hope our players are excited. It happened by accident, honestly. We were supposed to play Ohio State and Louisville, but because of game times and it got switched to Connecticut. I'm fine with it. They're a great program and a great team.

The same thing with Baylor, actually. We were supposed to play someone else, UOP. They dropped us, so we ended up playing Baylor.

But I hope our team is really excited. You don't win championships in November or December, but I think you can build a really good foundation then.

But you can learn a lot about your team. We have a very young team. It's like throwing our team into the deep end of the pool early.

When we played in Italy, we played against professionals. I know we have a lot of work to do. I think it will give our team a sense of urgency. We start tomorrow with practices, and I think it's going to help our practices. There is not going to be any fluff. We're going to cut right to the chase.

Q. You've signed a contract extension. You're coming off a Final Four year. How energized are you? As a follow-up for the players, I want to talk about emotional tone setting. Karlie was a calm player on the court for you, Erica was an emotional player. How do you not only replace the production but the emotional tone they set on the floor?

BRITTANY MCPHEE: As far as emotional, I think we have other players who maybe don't express it to you guys, but we definitely have people that have a lot of emotion throughout the game. Kaylee Johnson and Marta Sniezek are competitive and can get us fired up.

As far as calm, I think a lot of us generally are a little bit more like that. It's obviously hard losing characteristics like that, but I think people will figure it out, and we'll be okay.

ALANNA SMITH: Yeah, I think (indiscernible) Karlie led the way, too, and kind of showed how to be those types of leaders. So I think the leaders on our team have kind of an easy job of stepping into that role because they did such a good job of showing how to do that.

TARA VANDERVEER: I was just having lunch with Janie McCauley, and something came up about, How long are you going to do this? And I said, Well, I just signed up for three more years. So that's how that story got out there. I didn't know that was going to be a topic of discussion.

But I'm very excited about our team. I'm very excited about the future of our program. Just, obviously, we've got the veterans and people like Britt and Alanna and Kayl and Marta and people like that that are playing a lot.

But we're really excited about our freshmen and our sophomores too. Our main job is to keep everybody healthy and keep improving.

Q. How does this freshman class with Kiana Williams and the rest of these people compare with the great freshmen classes that you've had in the past? Are you going to urge Maya Dodson to dunk in a game?

TARA VANDERVEER: I think Maya will dunk. But it's going to happen. Maybe she'll throw it down in warm-ups first.

As far as our freshmen, I think as freshmen, they're as good as any freshmen we've had. I hope they're as great as sophomores as juniors and seniors and that they are the type of leaders and great people that we have on our team right now as juniors and seniors.

But they're a very talented group. They have the advantage of having great upperclass mentors like Britt and Alanna who understand it's not about keeping freshmen down or keeping them in their place, but really helping them and building them up in a way that they know that -- I mean, Britt and Alanna are the foundation of our team and upperclassmen, but we know that they need more, and they understand that.

So it's a combination of great talent. Really outstanding freshmen, but also great older mentors.

Q. Britt and Alanna, I hear you guys have some fun outdoor trips you're doing over the weekends, like Yosemite and places like that. Can you talk about that and what it does to build team chemistry?

BRITTANY MCPHEE: Yeah, our teammate Alexa Romano and I always try to go somewhere on the weekends during the summer, not during the season. We always bring -- like Alanna came with us, Mikaela's gone on a couple. People come all the time. We just try to get out and get in a different atmosphere. We went to Yosemite and Mammoth Lakes last weekend.

It's just fun to get to know each other. It's a lot of time you don't have any cell service you can't even listen to the radio. There is no radio. So you really get to learn a lot about each other that you otherwise wouldn't talk about like on the court. So it's a lot of fun.

ALANNA SMITH: Yeah, it's not every day that you have to sleep in a three-man tent with four people. So, yeah. You get up close and personal. It's awesome.

BRITTANY MCPHEE: It was pretty squished. Alanna will tell you we got a little jumpy, because we were pretty squished.

ALANNA SMITH: Yeah, it was nice and warm and safe.

Q. This isn't anything new, but surprise, surprise, the Stanford fall sports are doing incredible. Your women's soccer team is No. 1 in the country. Bryce Love is in the Heisman conversation, et cetera, et cetera. What's that like for you kind of in the second season of Stanford sports? What interaction do you have with the other teams, with the other athletes? Is there inspiration going on? I'm interested in that relationship.

BRITTANY MCPHEE: Yeah, for sure. We go watch the other games as much as we can when we don't have practice. It is definitely like, all right, you're the next act. You don't want to have any drop-off. Because obviously our spring sports are great too. It definitely keeps us accountable. We don't want to be the scrubs of the campus. So, yeah.

ALANNA SMITH: We all do a good job supporting other sports. We go to every volleyball game that we can make and soccer and football. We see volleyball players, football players, soccer players at our games, too, and it kind of enhances that camaraderie that we have.

It's so exciting to see other teams be successful and kind of join in their celebrations too. It gives you energy. It's awesome.

Q. First for the potential scrubs of the campus, as you prepare for a new year, you reflect on the previous year to help your future be better. When they're done, Coach, if you'd be willing to comment on this. First I'm wondering what it was like to be part of the entire ride last year with Coach's milestone and maybe your reflections on last year. Coach, are you extremely relieved that you can start this year working on 2,000 now?

BRITTANY MCPHEE: Last year was so cool just to see all of the lives Tara had impacted, because so many people came back for the game and all the videos and everything we saw. It was just cool to see how basketball is more than just a game. It's like the relationships you make will affect you your whole life.

So just to experience that and to experience and see how much success Tara had. They laid out like the 1,000 pennies just to see how big that is. It was really fun to be a part of.

ALANNA SMITH: Yeah, I think it was really a special year for us as well as Tara. I think we were just so honored to be able to be a part of that journey. Tara inspires us every day as a coach. To be able to see the other people that she's inspired was really special, yeah.

TARA VANDERVEER: I love listening to Alanna talk. You know, I just can't -- I mean, it was a special night probably because my mom was there, and then I was really glad because by winning that night, then, she went home too. And I love my mom, but it was like: Time to go. (Laughing.)

You know, what made it really special for me was the team that I was part of that year in that just the -- I thought really (indiscernible) Karlie were going to get me with water, but it was (indiscernible).

But it was such a special team to share something special with. It just reminded me why we do this. It is relationships. It is the growth that you see with young women. To see these two right now compared to like when they were freshmen. It's so exciting how much they've matured and how much they really get playing

basketball at this level.

So that's the one thing as a coach is to see them grow. Then like Britt said, I heard from so many people I've either coached or have been part of this coaching journey. To me, that's what it's all about.

Q. For Brittany and Alanna, I'm curious how you saw yourself develop this off-season, specifically to your on the court game. Like Brittany, I've seen you be a tough driver, I've seen you start to develop your mid-range game, and last year you started shooting threes. So I'm curious what you've added to your game, because Stanford guards always get better in post play.

BRITTANY MCPHEE: Yeah, for me this summer I was definitely still working on being more consistent from outside, looking more to get my teammates open when I drive and draw the extra person. There are so many other people who could get maybe better shots. So definitely working on that.

Then just being more vocal out there. Because I kind of deferred seniors last year, so that was something I was working on.

ALANNA SMITH: Yeah, something I was probably working on over the summer was kind of extending my game outside of just the post. Which is everything with ball handling and shooting and passing. Yeah, I think I had a really good learning opportunity being able to play in India with the Australian National Team. That was really special. I think that was an awesome learning experience for me. I kind of opened my eyes to international basketball too.