

Pac-12 Women's Basketball Media Day

Wednesday, October 11 2017



Mark Trakh

Kristen Simon

Sadie Edwards

USC Trojans

MARK TRAKH: This is my first year. My second stint at USC. And I'm really looking forward to it. I'm excited. It's good to be back home, good to be back in Los Angeles and coaching at a university that I really love. It's not often you get a chance to get your dream job twice in the same lifetime. I've been able to be fortunate enough to do that. I'm grateful for the opportunity.

Getting the job, we knew we inherited a talented group of young women, and we've been working with them the last four months. We've been emphasizing culture as far as them working hard, working together. You know, learning to trust each other and I think they're really buying in. I'm excited about the energy and passion they show every day in practice. I think we've got some good parts, you know.

And these two young women to my left have been exceptional these last four months. Kristen Simon is a very, very talented post player. She's great. We're back to the basket. She can face the basket. She's a great rebounder. She's really evolving into an excellent leader that's being consistent every day in practice.

And Sadie Edwards, I can't say enough about her work ethic. She plays hard all the time. She's very receptive. She's like a sponge as far as her learning. She's always asking questions. She's one of those players that needs to know why she's doing things. I love her questions. They're always very, very intelligent, very well-placed. So I'm looking forward to coaching her. Great athlete, can shoot the ball can get to the rim, and she can really, really defend.

I'm really, really impressed with these two young women off the court. They're both working on their masters degrees right now, so they're both going to leave SC, hopefully, with a great senior season, and more importantly or most importantly, their masters degree.

Q. Could you have imagined this would happen

again? That you would be back? Can you just kind of talk about the circumstances that brought you back here?

MARK TRAKH: No, you know, it's funny. This is something corny, but my girlfriend had these -- this Japanese tradition where you write a wish and you burn it, and it goes up in the air and the wish is supposed to come true. So I was messing around, and I wrote I wish I'd coach at SC again some day. The thing went up, and the only problem with that in retrospect, I would have wished for winning the lottery, if I had a second chance.

But that was obviously one of my dreams to come back. We had a great team in New Mexico State coming back again, it was probably our best team we've ever had next year. I was excited about that. Figured I'd be in Las Cruces for the next eight to ten years. And USC called and it was just a great opportunity. I was really grateful for it to come back and get to coach these young women. So I'm very, very excited.

Q. You and I have spoken the past few years that in retrospect when you were at SC previously, you had a lot of injuries. You changed philosophy a little bit on how you practiced. I don't know if the players are aware of this. Can you explain are you doing this that you're not as physical or contact drills?

MARK TRAKH: We had a lot of injuries at SC. I thought we have really good talent if we could get everybody on the floor, but we couldn't. The last few years we were missing four to eight of our best players every game. So when I got to New Mexico State I just looked and tried to figure out why we were always hurt. So we modified the practices so kids weren't allowed to dive for loose balls, I didn't let them take charges anymore, we stopped doing rebounding drills, and we hadn't had a player miss a game or practice in four years. They missed a couple practices.

But the biggest ability is availability. So New Mexico State we went 46-2 in conference, but I always had all my players on the floor. So having your best players available was a big thing. So coming here, we have the same philosophy. They hear about it every day. Like be careful, respect your teammate in practice, you know. I think it's worked out. I think it's worked out well

for us. I want to keep my second stint at SC, I want to keep everybody healthy and get the kids on the floor.

Q. A follow-up to the players to both of you. Very talented, mark is a very experienced coach and we're very old friends. So what is the difference and how is the team doing right now?

SADIE EDWARDS: I think from day one Coach Trakh and our new staff was very clear about their vision for our program moving forward. I think every single day we're taking a step towards that goal. The foundation we're building right now is very strong, and it's founded on togetherness, unselfishness. You know, giving your best effort every day, every second. Being consistent is like a big thing for them.

We have a new slogan that's like stay gold because you want to have a gold standard of culture. I think just having that, having that structure will go a long way for us this year.

KRISTEN SIMON: Yeah, definitely. Coach always says in practice we're teaching plays, but we're also teaching you how to play. Just learning the game of basketball, the feel of it at such a high pace but a different intensity, it's really helped not only the seniors but a lot of our younger players are beginning to understand the pace at a college level and the physicality and all of that. But also being able to learn the technicalities and all that.

Q. (Inaudible)?

KRISTEN SIMON: I think this year for me, I personally don't believe it's anything to do physically. It's more mentally, just being a better leader. Like Coach said, being more consistent, being the spark that we need. Doing the little things for our team and making sure everybody is staying on the path that we're trying to go on. But it's definitely just being a better leader overall for the team.

Q. Following up on the educational piece, Sadie, my notes say you want to be a sports psychologist. Is that still true?

SADIE EDWARDS: Either that or coaching.

Q. So you're getting a masters right now?

SADIE EDWARDS: Yes, ma'am.

Q. And Kris, where you are in your education?

SADIE EDWARDS: I'm in the communication management program. A lot of it is just basically about how communication impacts so many different platforms and domains in life. Pretty much every organization, a key part of their success is effective communication on every level, so I think it's kind of priming me to be a better leader in some capacity. It

also helps me. There are so many parallels that I see between learning in practice, and embracing and relishing that leadership role. So it's been a blessing to be part of that program.

KRISTEN SIMON: I'm also in the same program. Me and Sadie have a class together. I think everybody but us in the class has a job. For us, we have a little bit of a different perspective, but it's very similar, just how Sadie said. Effective communication, I think, has helped out a lot. Just understanding how to talk to people, understanding the best way to get through to people, the most effective ways to handle situations. I think being on a team and being in the workforce or workplace with people, it's the same type of dynamic. We have to get everybody to work together to accomplish the same goals. So it's definitely helped out for us just to be able to communicate better.

Q. You've both had pretty interesting collegiate journeys. Sadie started in UConn, coming in, same with you with injuries and stuff. I'd love to know what maybe both of you have learned from your past couple years from your journeys. And what you hope to use from that knowledge that you've gained in this last year at USC?

SADIE EDWARDS: I think something that was big for me is learning that everything comes in its time. I think there were so many things I wanted to help our team accomplish. But as I person, I needed to grow and develop and be a better teammate. My character needed to change. In retrospect, I wasn't ready to handle all of the things that I wanted. I think now I'm in a position where there was a lot of tough times. At the time, I resented those tough times and I wanted to run from them rather than embrace them and embrace the fact that it was going to prepare me for this moment.

And I think now more than ever, I'm appreciative and I'm grateful for everything that I've been through and everything that I've experienced in the tough times. It's made me who I am and made me ready. Like the time is now. I think for me, I think this is when it all comes together for us as a team. I think we've always had talent, and we haven't been able to put it together. We have a chip on our shoulders and we're ready to turn a new leaf for USC women's basketball. I think we're all looking forward to it.

KRISTEN SIMON: Yeah, definitely. I think the two most important things is life is hard. Way harder than I expected it to be. But staying your course, staying on your path, if you believe in something, to continue to work for it. Like Sadie said, there are a lot of things that I expected to do as a freshman, as a sophomore, that I wasn't able to do, but I continuously just worked hard. Regardless if the results didn't show yet, I

continued to work on it regardless.

So, for me, it was just continuously staying on my course, staying on my path regardless of the highs and lows, because there are going to be highs and lows, and just working hard. That's one thing I've really learned in college is just working hard, as hard as I possibly can.

Q. Sadie, for you, in just looking at your major and what you just said, one of the things I had in mind about you is you're kind of hard on yourself. I think cop competitors can be that way. Have you found a way to funnel that energy, and has anything you've learned in your studies helped you with that in your game?

SADIE EDWARDS: Yeah, I think especially in the past I'd get discouraged really easily. So when things didn't go my way, like if you watch the games sometimes I'd be like this and then like this over the course of a few games. So I think a lot of what I'm learning in class is helping me respond more effectively. As a leader, one of the most important traits you can have is compassion. And the biggest thing about compassion is it starts with yourself. If you're not kind to yourself, you're not going to be able to consistently do that for others. So I think I've taken a lot of time to approach my journey with a sense of appreciation, and understanding of how things are not always going to be great, but learning from that and working through that rather than just letting it take me out of things. I think in the past it did. It discouraged me a lot, it impacted my play and impacted who I was as a teammate and as a leader. But I think it's different now. I've grown. I'm just taking advantage of that.

Q. Coach, now that you have a second track at your dream job, what do you want USC basketball to be about?

MARK TRAKH: Yeah, I want it to be about success on and off the floor. It's really important what our kids learn during their experience. It's really important that they have a good collegiate experience, get their degree. They're part of a team where they grow and they learn over the four years of course, bottom line, you have to win on this level. But I think you do it the right way with good kids that want to work hard on and off the floor. Doing it the right way, including good, quality student-athletes, and the dream of every coach is to go to the Final Four some day.

I think that's our vision, and that's what we want. So I think the kids have a vision. Coaching staff has a vision. Hopefully, we'll all come together and work as hard as we can. I just want them to be the best they can be every time they take the floor. Whether we lose the game by one, win it by one, lose it by 20. As long

as they gave 100% effort and they can walk off the floor and say we gave it everything we have tonight. I think that's what we've got to work towards.

Q. Coach, upon your return is, what felt the same and what felt different?

MARK TRAKH: As far as coaching the young women, that's what makes this job great. You get to coach young people. You go every practice. It's like you go into practice like a kid. It's like you're excited. You get in there, you get to work, like I can't shoot anymore -- well, I never could shoot. I can't play. But I can watch, I can teach. You feed off their energy. So that will always remain consistent regardless of where you coach. As far as SC, it's a great university, great tradition, great athletic program. Facilities were upgraded, the John McKay Center, so the campus looks a little different. So I love LA. That hasn't changed much except for traffic and the housing prices, otherwise it's a lot the same.

But, yeah, there is not much change yet there is -- I mean, just the Pac-12 and this Media Day, I think it's so much bigger. It serves the student-athletes so well to get them out there and get them exposure. I just think this is great. I'm overwhelmed right now at everything that's happening and everything that's planned today. I think that's definitely changed. I think that's such a great thing for the young student-athletes.

Q. A couple things for both of the players. There is one true freshman on the team, Shalexus Aaron. I've got to know about her. With a name like that, she's got to be quite a personality. Tell us what it's like playing with her. Also, I was pleasantly surprised, Jordan Adams on the roster? She's got eligibility? How's that having her able to come back too?

KRISTEN SIMON: Shalexus fit perfectly with the team. Her brother plays on the men's basketball team, his name is Shaquan Aaron. And Shalexus can really dance. I didn't notice it until two weeks ago, but she can really dance. She's way more outgoing than it seems.

She's fit perfectly with our team. She's going to be good whether she plays this year or next. She's going to be a key component when she comes back with her injury.

And Jordan, oh, yeah, Jordan I don't think anybody on my team is as happy as me that Jordan is back, and I remind her of that every day. But Jordan does everything, she rebounds, she can hit timely shots, she can hit a pull-up. She can play the one through four, and there are not many people that can play the one through four. I think that's absolutely amazing to me.

All around, she's just a good person. She's a good fit for any type of team, but I'm really excited that she's back.

She's going to try to get more rebounds than me this year, but we're going to see how that goes.

MARK TRAKH: I'll tell you a story about Jordan. I started coaching her, and she came up to me, she said, Coach Trakh? I said, Yeah. She said, You realize that you recruited me when you were a coach the first time here. That's how long she's been at SC.

KRISTEN SIMON: It's her third senior year.

SADIE EDWARDS: Yeah, I don't think she's getting another one. It's great to have her back. She does so much for us like Kristen was saying. It was unfortunate when she got hurt last year because she's playing unbelievable basketball for us. She's fought through so much in her college career.

Every time I look at her every day, I'm like, wow, that strength to keep going is incredible to me. I think it inspires us as a group. I think she's going to help us a ton. To have her leadership, her experience, her abilities, it allows us to do a lot more things on offense and defense. So we're looking forward to that.

Q. I was wondering what kind of impact -- is she eligible, Minyon's sister?

MARK TRAKH: She's got a red shirt.

Q. So the two of them together, I can imagine can be kind of a handful, right?

MARK TRAKH: You guys want to answer that?

KRISTEN SIMON: I've never met two sisters that are so alike but so different. They are individuals. Their dynamic is weird.

SADIE EDWARDS: It's different, they are similar in so many ways, but in a lot of ways they're polar opposites. But Mariya's a great basketball player, unbelievable instincts. I know she can't play this year, which is unfortunate because that would have helped us.

But just having her in practice, she's been places that nobody else on our team has been, and experienced success that nobody else on our team has experienced. So just her presence, she helps me. I know individually matching up with her, she helps me every day. I'm grateful to have her around. I think she'll have a great year. And I think getting a year under her belt of adjusting to a new program will pave the way for her to have an unbelievable senior year.

MARK TRAKH: When we were recruiting her, I was

watching the interaction between the sisters, I said, there is no way we're getting Mariya here. I was shocked when she goes -- she texted me and says I've made my decision, I'm coming to SC because it's always been a dream to play with my sister. I was like, who would have known that?

KRISTEN SIMON: Exactly. That's true.

Q. I don't know if you saw the Pac-12 preseason poll came out this morning, and you see the So Cal rivals UCLA has been chosen to win the conference again this season. Do any of you have any response to that?

SADIE EDWARDS: We're ready.

KRISTEN SIMON: We're ready for this year. We're ready. I think we'll shock a lot of people. We're ready.

SADIE EDWARDS: Yeah. I would say things are different now. That's good for them, obviously. I'm friends with a lot of them, and they've worked really hard and to see how far they've come is awesome. But like I said, we're ready and we're coming.

It's just a different feel this year. I'm so excited to get started. Like Kristen said, I truly believe we're going to shock a lot of people. So, yeah, we're just looking forward to it all.