

PAC-12 Women's Basketball Media Day

Wednesday, October 11 2017

Jody Wynn

Mai-Loni Henson

Hannah Johnson

Washington Huskies

JODY WYNN: Thank you for having us. We're all rookies here, all three of us. First time being here, and it's been a great morning so far. We're excited about what's in store for the rest of the day and to talk to you a little bit about Husky women's basketball.

Q. Congratulations. Welcome to the conference. What's been your biggest challenge so far?

JODY WYNN: Figuring out who can practice every single day. Who do we have in practice, honestly? We just had a few injuries and knickknack things that are sidelining some players.

But outside of that, nothing too much. It's been a very welcoming environment, one in which my coaching peers have helped with the adjustment and just living in a new city and a new state for the first time.

So, yeah. Just the logistics of maybe getting our whole family up to Seattle has probably been the most difficult thing.

Q. (Off microphone)?

JODY WYNN: Lot of heart, lot of grit, lot of toughness. I want people to recognize that we're playing with full hearts and a whole lot of passion every single possession, that we don't take possessions off, based on our effort. Our attitude is high, positive, and that we control the controllables.

Q. In terms of your freshmen, what are you hoping for this year in your freshmen? Your team is kind of in the middle of some upperclassmen. How do you see your freshmen contributing? And if you can give us a couple names that you think will be factors this year.

JODY WYNN: Sure. We have five freshmen, three I brought in late and two that signed with the former staff in the fall last fall. They're going to be thrown into the fire right away.

We only have two active seniors on the roster right now. So a lot of youth. They bring a lot of spunk, a lot



of energy.

To name one or two, that might be a little difficult at the present because we just started workouts again.

But Kierra Collier is a guard out of Kansas City, and she's athletic, defensive guard. A long lefty that creates a lot of offense through her defense. So she's a pretty special talent.

I will say that Missy Peterson, a guard that we brought in late that has a really good IQ for her age, she understands how to make people better around her.

But, honestly, all five of them bring something valuable to the table. Khayla Rooks is a high-IQ kid that can play all over the basketball court.

So just time will tell, but they're definitely going to be thrown into the fire if they continue to work as hard as we need them to.

Q. Seems like a unique situation you're stepping into. Obviously has been a great run of success there, but lose two WNBA picks and consensus Player of the Year, but how have you approached this challenge as you've settled into the job?

JODY WYNN: With one foot in front of the other every single day. I think Kelsey, Chantel, Katie, Heather, Coach Neighbors and his staff did a phenomenal job of bringing Huskies women's basketball back to national prominence. It's something where the community continually talks about the women's pass ball program, and it's not even close to being season.

So our job is to embrace what was before us, learn lessons of how to work extremely hard and to achieve great things.

And that's what we're taking from those girls that have since graduated and moved on and to now establish our own identity, and that is just working extremely hard and understanding that we have a great opportunity.

We're in an amazing city that really loves and embraces women's basketball. So we have a ton of people that really understand this transition and what we're going through right now, to really let our players know that it's a phenomenal opportunity to play in the

No. 1 conference in America on such a great stage in an amazing city for an awesome university and why not them.

Q. For the players, what is the most exciting part about this transition, and what is the most difficult part?

HANNAH JOHNSON: I think the most exciting part is everyone gets an opportunity now. I think people obviously get to step up and play a bigger role, myself included and Mai-Loni, and maybe roles we didn't play before. But it's just an opportunity.

There is no pressure. It's just play the game of basketball, have fun, and play hard. I think that's really exciting. And the system that we run is an equal opportunity system. So everyone gets an opportunity to score the basketball and make plays. So just being able to play freely with the basketball is really exciting.

I think -- I don't think there's been really a challenge with the transition with Coach Wynn here. She's been great, and it's been amazing. I think just how she mentioned, the injuries, little nagging injuries that we have, myself included, it's been a little frustrating. But besides that, the coaches have made this transition pretty easy.

MAI-LONI HENSON: I think I'd have to agree with Hannah on that. We have an equal opportunity. We all have a chance to really show off what we can do and what we have worked to do in the past to get us to this point.

I think a challenge that we may -- may not for the transition, but in the future may just be like we're not always going to be on top every game. I think for us that's just like a learning opportunity.

It can be -- it can put us down a little bit sometimes when we're not coming out on top, because that's what we are used to, but I think us having a young team, it's a better learning opportunity for us that we will eventually overcome. I just think that that will grow from it.

Q. Jody, welcome. This is for Hannah and Mai-Loni again. There are so many transfers in women's basketball these days. So going off the previous question, why did you decide to stay? What about Jody and what the program is doing now? Why did you decide to stay?

MAI-LONI HENSON: For me, a big part of my decision to come to Washington in the first place was because of the family aspect. And I don't think that's something that we lost. I think it's something we continue to grow and gain. So that was a really big part for me.

And also the girls, the girls are a consistent piece from the last coaching staff to the new coaching staff. So I think a big part is also the relationships that I built with these girls. They're like my sisters, so I can't leave them behind.

HANNAH JOHNSON: I love Seattle. Seattle is the best place. I want to live there probably for the rest of my life. So that's a big reason.

But Coach Wynn, I knew her from high school, so obviously I knew about her. I knew how she was. I was excited. I knew that the change was going to be good, and I had faith, and I wanted to stay. I wanted to stay, too, because I just wanted to stay loyal. I think that's important. I've been a -- I'd rather die a Dawg. I want to take Coach Wynn's place one day as a coach. No, I just want to stay loyal, and it felt right to stay.

Q. I have a question. You're now, you know, not new to the Pac-12, you've played there, coached there, but coming from Long Beach State where you were more a defensive identity team, defense wasn't something they really talked about at U-Dub as much, like talking about the team. How are the players incorporating that defensive philosophy in adjusting?

JODY WYNN: Mai-Loni said to me we ran more in practice than we ran all year last year.

MAI-LONI HENSON: It's true.

JODY WYNN: No, until we get all of the personnel in that we need to run the system that we like to run, it's going to be a challenge, but piece by piece. One thing that you have to remember as coaches is that they want to learn. They want to get better every single day they step on the court.

It's just a really positive atmosphere. They're excited. It's not like, oh, we have to play defense in practice today. And it's not like we do that the entire practice, but it is half the game.

But I think they're excited to be taught or to be demanded of on the defensive side of the ball. Yeah, it might not be what we want it to be one day, but we're establishing a foundation right now and trying to build a culture where effort and toughness can make up for a lack of size or skill.

HANNAH JOHNSON: I love defense.

MAI-LONI HENSON: We love it now. Grown to love it.

JODY WYNN: I promise, I didn't brainwash them.

Q. Jody, professionally, coming into the Pac-12, I know you're familiar with the conference, but, I mean, it's a much different conference than it was even four or five years ago. What is that like for you as a challenge coming into a conference that is statistically the best in the nation?

JODY WYNN: Yeah, that's why I made the move. Being able to be a part of the No. 1 women's basketball conference in America, I mean, to me, that's why I do what I do, to surround myself with excellence, to have incredible role models to look up to.

I mean, I've watched them on TV. I've been recruited by them and coached against some. But it's just an absolute honor to be a part of this conference at this time.

I have a lot of respect for Tara and all of the great coaches in this league that are legends of the game. I just really respect their approach. I really respect how they're classy people and we do things with integrity, and I wanted to be a part of that.

Q. How do you view being picked to finish 12th? Do you guys not talk about it? Is it a motivation tactic for you guys?

JODY WYNN: Honestly, I really don't care. Even when I was at Long Beach State and we might have been picked whatever we were picked, it was nothing that we ever really talked about in the preseason because it really matters on what you do at the end.

All we're doing every single day is just trying to get a little bit better every single day. Just a little bit better every single day. That's all we can ask of each other. It's all I can ask of myself, my coaches, and every player in this program.

We've always said that sometimes the scoreboard might be a liar, but we won inside, we won with our effort, we won with our heart, and eventually that scoreboard will tell the truth.

HANNAH JOHNSON: Yeah, I agree. Like Coach said, we don't really care. We just are focused on improving game to game, practice to practice. And it's not something we're going to go cry about. I think it's something we look at and: You know what? Let's embrace it. We're the underdogs. Okay. We have nothing to lose.

I think that's what all of our mentalities have been like, and obviously it's because Coach Jody has helped us with that.

Q. Kelsey kind of dominated everything in the

headlines -- the program, the leadership -- and was the Player of the Year and did fabulous things. How have you guys kind of overcome that void from a leadership standpoint in the locker room, getting in extra work, and yet a whole coaching change? You guys are the ones that are having to navigate that.

HANNAH JOHNSON: I think we've obviously taken a lot from Kelsey. Me, personally, I have a relationship with her where I'll call her and ask her for advice on being a better leader. She helps me, and she puts me in my place. I tell her how I handle some things, and she says: You should do this a different way. So I've been able to learn a lot from her.

But I think it's time we established our own identity. Yeah, let's take what Kelsey did and what Chantel did, but we don't -- we never want to shy away from the culture that we built, but let's make it our own.

So I think we can take great things from that and make it into our own type of thing. So, yeah, we don't have a Kelsey Plum, but how about let's get extra reps in then. That's what she did. So let's get in the gym. Let's get in the gym a little bit more because we don't have that so-and-so best player.

MAI-LONI HENSON: I think for me, personally, just not being able to see the floor as much once conference play started last year. I kind of already developed this mentality of I'm going to work hard, I'm going to get better because my time was coming next year, because Chantel and Kelsey are going to have to leave eventually. They'll have to move on and do their own thing.

I think for me, and maybe Hannah and the other players, we started building this mentality that we're not going to have as much next year. So we started early in developing this mindset that we have to establish the new roles and take pride in them.

That really just started with, you know, hard work, work ethic, and it's just something that we really need to take pride in and really embrace, no matter what they put us in the rankings. Don't really care about rankings.

But, for me, I just developed it pretty early.