

Pac-12 Women's Basketball Media Day

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Scott Rueck

Katie McWilliams

Destiny Slocum

Oregon State Beavers

SCOTT RUECK: It's great to be back at Media Day, Pac-12 Networks, the studios. Obviously always do such a fantastic job. Thank you, Natalia. And it's good to be back at the start of a new year. This is my ninth year now back at Oregon State. And the culture is tight, as evidenced by just the time we spent on our team retreat this past weekend, is always something we do each year, and we were just talking about it and reminiscing how much fun we had and how special this group is. And it's something we work really hard to do, is to put a team together that can be such a tight-knit group that operates as a family, and this is just another version of Oregon State women's basketball that has that in place.

And so this is a very special group that I'm excited to get to help lead this year, and I can't wait to start this journey with them in a conference that is as good as any. It's an honor to get to participate in it night in and night out. There's going to be all kinds of challenges to face this year, and I'm excited for that with this group. And so we're glad to be back.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions.

Q. For you, Coach, actually, and for the players as well, you've gone through several cycles where you have a major player who graduates and moves on, and you have that sort of reboot in a sense. Do you feel like in marquis players that sort of really define your program and move on that you've figured out kind of the best way to put the program back in a place where you want it to be without worrying about who you lost the year before?

SCOTT RUECK: Yeah. Thank you, Michelle. And by the way, this is Katie McWilliams and Destiny Slocum. So anyway, well, I think that's a great problem to have. In the last three years we've had four of our students drafted in the WNBA. And so that anytime someone does that, that leaves a void and it leaves a hole, and then it creates an opportunity for the next group to step up into that.

And so Marie certainly had as great a year as you possibly could imagine a player having last year, in every way, and I know all of you that followed us so closely were able to watch that, the year she had. And so you know how important she was to our program. For three years Marie was consistent saying a word. There was no place to get a word in as a leader. And so she learned all those lessons and then stepped into that role for our team last year as our only senior.

And so with her loss, you know, it's one of the things we talked about this weekend is how great she was and what she brought to us that are now gone and need to be replaced. It's just good to verbalize those things, and so our team as a collective group can step up into those roles.

And so it's something that I think we all deal with, every program, college sports. And so it's cyclical. And so every year there's new opportunities for people and every year your team is going to be slightly different, but the foundation of who we are and how we operate remains the same.

And so when I mention culture, that's what I'm talking about. So I'm confident we'll have people step up, fill the void. We'll be slightly different, but that's the fun part of the journey that we're on each year.

KATIE MCWILLIAMS: For me, I've had the opportunity to learn and watch those leaders these last three years, and so I know what it takes to be a leader on the court and just to learn from McKee and Sydney and Jamie (phonetics), all those people that I got to play with was a privilege. And it's made me a better person and a better basketball player.

Q. Coach, so taking a look at your roster, you might have the biggest team in the country with three players 6'7" or taller, certainly the biggest in the Pac-12. I wondered if you could talk about what that size brings to your team even though you lose Marie who is obviously great down low for you. And Katie and Destiny, what's it like playing with that size in practice and looking forward to games this year?

SCOTT RUECK: It's interesting. The shortest coach and the tallest team. It's kinds of ironic. But we always

want what we can't have, I guess. So if I can't be tall, I'm going to align with tall people. Throughout my career, early in my career at a Division III school, you don't always get to pick who you get to coach because you don't have scholarships to offer. And then you stumble into a team that has a 5'11" center one year and a 6'4" center one year. And you just learn how to make it work.

I've learned that I really like tall posts. That's something that has worked well with me throughout my career and with the status of Ruth Hamblin, even before her, Patricia Bright before her, and Thais Pinto with Patricia, and then Ruth Hamblin came in, and everybody knows about Ruth and the success that she had as being 6'7" really. So that just feeds itself a little bit.

And so I think if you're a tall post player, you're looking for programs that know how to use you and have had success. And so now, you know, with this talent, A, it's going to help us replace Marie. It's going to allow us to continue to do some of the things that we've done.

They're amazing people. They're going to be amazing players. They're inexperienced in comparison to Marie at this moment, but we've got a team to bring them along and we've got a group of perimeter players that play at such a high level that it's going to make sure jobs easy, especially early in the year. And it's going to be fun to watch them develop and turn into the next Ruth, the next Marie. And so we're excited.

KATIE MCWILLIAMS: I'd have to say it's a little scary driving into the paint now because they're so tall in there. But no, the three posts have been awesome so far and I can see their desire to grow as players and as people. So I'm super excited to play with them this year.

DESTINY SLOCUM: I mean, I think it's every point guard's dream to look down the line and see 6'7", 6'9", and then a 6'7" again, and you're like, wow, this is what I get to throw the ball to every time I drive in. So I think just having them and the people they are and them wanting to grow and learn from Marie is the best aspect of them all.

Q. Destiny, how did you approach last year having to just sit and watch for the first time in your life and not get to play games? We know how competitive you are. Where do you think your game is now compared to a year ago and kind of what your goals are for this season?

DESTINY SLOCUM: Initially it was really hard. I mean, the first game, not to be able to be out there with them and practice with them, but not being able to battle with

them was really hard for me, especially as a competitor. But then as the year went on, I had a perspective change, to be able to see a game from a place I've never seen it before and be able to watch them, get to know them.

Q. You mentioned a turning point for you, at what juncture did that light bulb turn on for you?

DESTINY SLOCUM: Literally during the first game when I was watching. I was like, this is the moment that I love these people, I love where I am, I love this culture. I love this staff. Like what can I do for them to make myself feel better. And like for them, it was just like having them around made me feel better. And then what was the question after?

Q. (Indiscernible).

DESTINY SLOCUM: Oh, from last year. I think, how I said, just seeing the game from a different perspective. Being very outward focused. And I realize as a one that's really important, too, because even though you're thrown into a leadership position just be being the one, you're bringing up the ball and (indiscernible) unfold throughout last year and learning how to get better from him. I mean, Sydney Wiese was there before. I've heard the stories. I've seen, watched film on her, like seeing how she ran the system and wanted to be like that. And for me that's where I am right now, is trying to be the best I can be but how can I be the best for my teammates as well as a one.

Q. Destiny or Katie, Destiny, I know you watched, that's a big adjustment to sit. We talked about your three post players. End of the game, who do you pass to inside? Who's the best one? Come on. You have a game tonight, game's on the line. Who do you pass to? I mean, I want to know.

DESTINY SLOCUM: All right. I gotta give it to a post. I mean, they're all good. So I'm going to give it to all of them.

Q. You just talked about three post players. I mean, I know if your teammate is open, you're passing to her. She's a great three-point shooter, but you gotta go inside. They're open. She's covered.

DESTINY SLOCUM: Right now I'm probably giving it to Jo Grymek.

Q. Why?

DESTINY SLOCUM: I think her watching Marie last year and kind of battling through Marie, if you'd seen her from where she was last year, her development as a player is amazing and her mindset is completely different than it was a year ago. And for me I think like seeing that growth and seeing her want to grow has me throw trust into her. So that's who I would trust if I'm throwing into a five. Right now, at this moment, her maturity, Jo.

Q. So, Katie, you've had some really big games, and this is your senior year. What are your personal goals for this season?

KATIE MCWILLIAMS: As a basketball player? As an individual? I mean, I just want the success for this team, of course. But I just want -- personally I want to be a better leader. I want to be able to have like a vocal presence on the court. And I know I try to lead by example, most of all, but I want to be able to speak up when I need to and have that vocal presence.

So but I also just want to -- I mean, it would be a goal for me to be on the All Pac-12 Team and to be on the All-Defensive Team. So those are my two main goals this year.

Q. Scott, with Destiny, she played point guard. I see your point guard right here. So is she going to play the two or is she a backup point? What are you going to do?

SCOTT RUECK: It makes us really versatile, doesn't it. So this is the first time that I've had four point guards on a roster because Katie played point guard when Sydney Wiese was out. She was Syd's backup at the point for two years and started eight games when Syd was out. So with Aleah Goodman and the year she had last year at the one, to have four people that have played the point, you can't have too many point guards on the floor.

And so I think that makes us extremely versatile, allows us to use Destiny in a variety of ways and not just one person controlling the ball all the time. I'm not ready to commit to anything yet. And so I just think those are all good problems to have.

Q. The game continues to get more and more physical each year. You guys have the size, the strength. How physical can you guys be in terms of competing in that area, and what are you thinking in terms of what the other teams have?

SCOTT RUECK: Well, I think that's a great question, and I thought that was a huge weakness of ours a year ago. Going into last year's season I was worried we'd get a rebound. I knew Marie would. But the other positions, I didn't know. You're looking at Kat. You know Mik is going to rebound. Taya played so much last year at the four and started from December on. And Taya is basically a perimeter player. How quickly is she going to adapt.

And then as the year went, everybody got to watch, we outrebounded Baylor. Baylor was outrebounded by one team all year long, and it was us in the tournament. And the physicality that we played with down the stretch was the difference for us.

So just with the evolution of each of those athletes, Katie throwing her body into people, Taya throwing her body into people, Kat becoming a big-time defensive rebounder, and along with everybody else that we have, I thought that was maybe the biggest adjustment from the beginning of the year for our program.

And so my expectation is that remains. And so they know what it takes now. I think that was the greatest thing about our finish last year, a year where we went into the year with high expectations but very limited experience. That all changed. And so now this is a very experienced team. Inexperienced at the five on the court, but not from watching. And so that changed. And so I'm anticipating -- I agree with you, you have to be physical to win, and I anticipate this team embracing that and being able to do that.

Q. Scott, kind of dovetailing on what Tammy asked you and how you answered it, folks on the outside looking in would say last year overachieved. They would put that moniker on you guys. Talked about the inexperience last year, the evolution of the team last year. Do you ever consider your club overachieving, or are those the expectations and standards you've set from year one? And then a quick take on what Destiny talked about, how she had to wait on the sidelines waiting her turn. What was it like for you knowing you were going to get her this year?

SCOTT RUECK: That was nice every day to wake up knowing that.

Q. I hear you, baby.

SCOTT RUECK: And most importantly, just so proud of Destiny for the way she handled last year. She made the most of it. That's a very difficult thing for someone to do. But Destiny from day one turned that into a positive instead of subbing herself out mentally in every way, she made everybody better every day and was everyone's biggest fan. And it was weird to go on the road and not have her, because she was such a huge part of our team but obviously couldn't travel with us last year. So couldn't be more proud of what she's done. Even to this point, she hasn't been on the floor yet in a game, but she's handled it perfectly.

As far as upstart, it's interesting to me. I mean, this program has finished in the Top 10 the last three years. And because you graduate someone doesn't mean that you're not going to be good the next year. It just means that that person left an incredible example to follow and so it's time for the next person to step in.

So our expectation is to win every night. I don't care if we're freshmen or seniors. And you know me, I've got

a national title with a bunch of freshmen, freshmen on that team. So I'm never scared by inexperience because I don't coach when they're juniors and seniors. I coach them today to be elite.

And so my expectations is that everybody performs. And so when you've got the character that those of you who know our team, if you know these people and you know who they are, you know they're winners in life, they're going to come through.

And so these are people that are on a mission. This culture is as tight as it's ever been. I know I say that to a fault, but it is. That's our true family. That's our standard, and that's how we choose to operate. When you've got those things, you're going to reach your potential every year. Think about our LA weekend. Second weekend we get absolutely drilled in LA both games. Well, UCLA and we lose an 18-point lead and lose and get swept down there. This team turned that into huge success down the road, down the stretch.

And so this team will do the same thing. Can we start out a little further ahead, I think we should, actually. I think we have the experience now to do that. So I don't care what outside perceptions really say. I just know that we're just going to keep doing what we do, and the hope is that that turns into lots of fun and lots of wins.