

Pac-12 Women's Basketball Media Day

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Mark Trakh

Aliyah Mazyck

Minyon Moore

USC Trojans

MARK TRAKH: We're very excited about the start of the year. This is our second year here, and what's great is the players know our expectations, and we understand the players and have gotten to know the players, and everybody has been working hard and practicing well. These kids are together. They play with passion. They play with a certain joy every day in practice, and it really makes it fun to coach.

Really excited about the year and opening November 6 against UC Riverside, especially excited about coaching these two young women athletes to my left who have both represented our university on the floor and off the floor and are just two awesome young women who have become very dear to the entire coaching staff and especially to me.

Q. Mark, can you talk about the strength of your backcourt? I think a lot of people are thinking you guys might have one of the best backcourts in the league, the quickness, the pace, the pressure that you guys are going to put on people and how that might impact your season?

MARK TRAKH: The question you just asked is a very important one when it comes to basketball, but I'm going to make a statement that's even more important when it comes to life, and the statement I'm going to make is everybody asks like why do you coach and what do you get out of coaching, and my response is, Tammy Blackburn, I had the privilege of coaching her when she was in high school. Ever since she was in fourth grade, I actually watched her grow up and I watched as she was growing her spirit, her tenacity, watching her get a scholarship to San Diego State, watching her start there for four years, calling her a close friend in life right now, and the thing I've got to tell you about Tammy right now, and we'll talk about my team, too, but the thing I want to tell you about Tammy is she faced the battle of her life last year, and if anyone can get through it, it was her.

We talked every day, and just to know what she was going through and how she faced it with courage and

that she never gave up, it was such an inspiration to me, and I know to our kids, and to people around the conference, and I just -- you know, I know the fact that you all supported her so much really got her through that tough time, and it meant so much to her and everybody that was close to her.

And so I just, again, want to thank you and thank you for all the great things that you've done, all the great things you've done for me ever since you were that little girl that walked into my gym in fourth grade and said -- she came in and said, Hey, I can play? And I said, Well, you're about that big, and I think she hit a three and walked out of the gym, like: Let's see you top that.

Thank you, and I'm so proud to see you in the position that you're in right now, interviewing me, and your teammate from that team, being the head coach at the University of Washington, it's funny how life works out. But hey, we're all together again. So thank you, Tammy, and keep fighting. We're all going to be with you.

Now, as far as --

(Applause.)

As far as the backcourt, yeah, not since Aimee McDaniel and Tammy Blackburn played together in high school have I seen a backcourt -- I think we've got a great backcourt. These two -- the thing is their energy, they're going to pressure you. The defense is going to start on the top with them, and it's going to energize the rest of the team. They're both great defensive players. They both take pride in their defense. They both work on their defense every day in practice, and then they're both pretty good offensive players, and their leadership, they lead by example. They say, hey -- they don't say work hard, they say look at me, work as hard as me or don't take the floor, and that's why I think they're great leaders.

That's what we've really emphasized. Lead by talking and motivating, but once the kids see you play -- and that's why they're so important to the team, and off the floor, too, two great wonderful women who I'm very privileged to coach and like you I'm sure will be very, very successful in life once they get away from basketball.

Q. Two-part question. What was that experience like just missing out on the NCAA Tournament last year, being one of those final teams in consideration? And for the players, how much does that motivate you to get to the NCAA Tournament this year?

MARK TRAKH: You know, as far as missing out, we use that as motivation, but we don't use it as motivation like, oh, we got cheated, we should have -- we're not victims. If we won one more game, we would be in there. So that's our responsibility, okay. We think we were one of the top 64 teams, but we're not motivated by saying we got cheated, we're motivated by saying, we're not going to give them an option next year.

We are going to have quality wins so they can't ignore us so we're not going to give them an opportunity to say, hey, these three teams in the Big Ten, which they weren't, were better than you. We're going to go out there and we're going to do it and we're -- these kids play with a chip on their shoulder, they practice with a chip on their shoulder, and this is great motivation for us, and I think our saying is take it out of the committee's hands and they're going to have no choice but to have us be part of one of the 64 teams next year.

MINYON MOORE: Yeah, just going off what Coach said, we for sure play with a chip on our shoulder. We were so close, closing game in Stanford, closing game in Oregon. Every day we look back at that film and think, if we could have won that game. Now all we can do is move forward and try our best next time to go harder and next year make the tournament, prove everybody wrong, prove to everybody why we should have been in those 64 teams.

ALIYAH MAZYCK: I mean, everything that we do, our shortcomings, add fuel to the fire, whether it's just a missed possession, a missed play. I could probably go back every game and count the mistakes that I've made that I wish I could do differently, and I'm pretty sure Minyon could, as well. And that also adds fuel to the fire. I'm not going to sit here and harp on us not making it. We were pretty dead at the end of the season anyways. But hopefully -- well, not hopefully, we'll definitely be there this year. See you guys there.

Q. Aliyah, Minyon, there was something about last year that was very special that we all celebrated, and that was the cultural change that we saw in your women's basketball program, and I'm hoping that you guys can talk about what was that change about, and how great was it to experience it with first-year head coach?

ALIYAH MAZYCK: Well, it definitely started with our coaching staff, and people think when we speak so

highly, like this was practiced. Like no, they're really just that great of a coaching staff.

Like just as a team, we didn't quite have that culture beforehand, so coming in and -- we didn't adjust to the culture that he brought in, we created our own culture and foundation last season so that we can build upon that this season, and it's all a process. Actually in our training they said don't be cliché. They said it's all a process, but it is. It's all a process. I feel like throughout this process, we've definitely thrown as young women on and off the court, and I think significantly that's because of Coach Trakh and our coaching staff. They provide a great balance, whether it's just him being handsome and -- (laughter) -- or just our coaching staff providing discipline and character or whatever it is, they come with it every practice, every game, every day, and I can't say that -- I can say we definitely appreciate them a lot for that.

MINYON MOORE: Yeah, going off of what Aliyah said, Coach Trakh and his coaching staff came in here and really stressed culture. That was his number one concern was to get culture because once we get our culture down, it will go and carry on to the court. And our incoming freshmen came in and adopted that culture that we've made that our coach has instilled in us every day.

That's the greatest thing we could have asked for is our coaches to come in here and care about us, care about our culture, care about our well being on and off the court, so we've all adopted it, and it's showing on the court. We're being more and more successful every year.

Q. Mark, your second stint in this league at the same school. Now that you've had one year under your belt, how has it changed from the time that you were there before?

MARK TRAKH: Well, I think going from the Pac-10 to the Pac-12, and the Pac-12 is much more competitive. I mean, you had good programs at Oregon, Oregon State, my first stint, but now you've got Final Four programs at Oregon and Oregon State. So that's a big difference, you know, and you've got a lot of great programs right now in Cal, UCLA, Stanford. You don't get a night off, Arizona State. So it's a very deep conference. It's a great conference to coach in. They love playing in it.

But I think the big difference is the depth of the conference and the quality of play and the quality of -- that's one of the top conferences if not the top women's basketball conference in the country, and I think that's the big difference from my first stint and my second stint here.

Q. I love watching you guys play, I love the intensity, okay, that you come after people like maybe one of the most feared teams to play, right, in the conference. But you're going to be missing a presence inside that you had previously. Who's going to make up for that presence?

MINYON MOORE: Yes, Kristen Simon will certainly be missed, but we have a great, great post in Kayla Overbeck that transferred from Vanderbilt that will be able to play for us this season. Got cleared by the NCAA and everything. Obviously her, and we had a couple injuries that now will be able to play in Asiah Jones. Marguerite Effa has for sure stepped up to the plate, our Jillian Archer, our freshman, will come in and bring a big presence inside. So yeah, really excited about them. I think they will help us for the loss of Kristen Simon.

ALIYAH MAZYCK: Just to piggyback off that, we didn't have the depth last year and now we do, so we're not going to single-handedly put the pressure on one person to pick up the slack that we miss in Kristen, but this is D-I basketball. We're all really good players. You just have to step up and showcase your talent, and that's about it.

Q. Mark, you had a very good -- I thought a good year. I know you guys were disappointed not getting to the tournament, but part of that was what you just talked about, depth and some injuries toward the end. How many people do you expect to really play with your rotation?

MARK TRAKH: Beginning of the year, 10, and then the roster -- the substitution pattern, as you know, having coached successfully for so many years, it shrinks as you get closer. Ten to begin with, but I don't want to go any lower than eight. When you're not playing eight people equally, but you've got to go to eight just to keep everybody fresh. I think after that Pac-12 tournament last year, we had five kids that played from 34 to 39 minutes a game, and we were shot. And we don't want to do that again.

And the thing is they played hard. They played hard all the time, and we don't want to be in that position again. We've got to keep the kids fresh and we've got to peak at the right time, and you can't do that if you're playing five kids all year.

ALIYAH MAZYCK: It's funny how as players, we are like, Come on, Coach, put me in the game, put me in the game. You're like, Coach, please, I need a break. Take me out. It's just cool now seeing that we have depth, we'll get some time to breathe. I don't know how I'm going to feel. I'm probably going to be super happy and my body is going to be super happy to have that time to rest, but it was cool playing 38 -- especially

going from playing like 20, so 38 minutes were cool.

MARK TRAKH: We were in the Pac-12 game last year and we were down by six and I think there was three minutes to go, so we didn't press because we don't have any depth, so I called for a press. I said, 22, and she looks at me, and she goes, No. And I said, Yes, we're pressing. She goes, No, we're not. And I said, You'd better do what I say, we're pressing. She's like, oh, some cuss words, and got to her spot, and then we stole the ball three straight times and ended up winning by one, so she goes, I guess that was the right call after all.

ALIYAH MAZYCK: Yeah, clearly he's a genius.

MARK TRAKH: No, not quite.

Q. Minyon, excited to hear how excited you are about playing with your sister.

MINYON MOORE: For sure.

Q. When that decision was made for her to come and join you, knowing that it was going to take a little bit of time for her to transfer, help us understand how that's going and what it means to you and her and your family, et cetera, et cetera.

MINYON MOORE: It's been awesome. Mariya and I have always had a dream to like be Moore sisters, like be on the biggest platform and be on the Moore sisters. In high school we had the opportunity, we had two years at Salesian High School in Richmond, but I tore both my ACLs back to back, so obviously that hindered my ability to be able to play with her for the two years, so the world worked out in mysterious ways, she transferred here last year, sat out, was able to keen in on her academics to be able to get the full -- just be able to graduate with her undergraduate. She worked her butt off. Our family is super happy because my mom doesn't have to travel all the way to Kentucky, she can just go to LA now.

Just as a family she brings a level of energy, a level of leadership. She's obviously been on the top level, Sweet 16 with Louisville, so she has that experience, and I think we really need that experience on this team because we are young now.

Yeah, we're super excited. She is obviously a three-point threat, an offensive threat, she does great on defense. I'm excited, and we obviously have history together. We grew up playing in the backyard together, so we know each other's capabilities, we know what our tendencies are. It should be really exciting. Watch out for us.

Q. Did you convince her to -- how the heck did this

happen?

MINYON MOORE: It's funny because actually her junior year of high school, she went to USC on her unofficial visit and I tagged along because we had a tournament out in LA. USC is actually her top four, I think, coming out of high school, and she decided obviously to go to Louisville instead, but I was like, oh, my God, I love USC. So growing up in my recruiting process, I was like, USC, USC, because of her and her unofficial visit. So it just happened to be that Cal and USC were her top two when transferring, and of course she's going to go with her little sister.

Q. Kind of following up, you've talked about Overbeck and Mariya, and they're kind of two of a larger set of sample of high-impact transfers coming in across the Pac-12. I don't have the numbers to kind of support it, but it feels like there are more high-impact transfers this year in the conference as opposed to previous years. What would you kind of say to these transfers coming in and the roles they could have in the Pac-12 this year?

MARK TRAKH: Well, I know to -- actually we have three transfers. Cheyanne Wallace was LMU's leading scorer last year, and she'll be playing for us, too. I know those transfers are going to make impacts for us, and I know we're talking about the sisters, we've got two sisters that are playing together, and then two sisters -- when we play Cal, there will be two sets of sisters, Desi Caldwell will be playing for us and Receé Caldwell will be playing for Cal. Receé was a high-impact transfer from Texas Tech. She's going to be really, really good for Cal. I think the transfer that -- Destiny Slocum up -- she's the real deal up there. So there's going to be some high-impact transfers in this conference, and they're going to -- they're going to play well right away. I really believe that.