

Pac-12 Women's Basketball Media Day

Monday, October 7, 2019

Charmin Smith

CJ West

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California Golden Bears



CHARMIN SMITH: Excited to be here. Thank you all for joining us. Excited to be here with CJ and Sara. Excited to see so many faces in the room. This is an incredible opportunity for us here. We're looking forward to having a great season. We've got great senior leadership with CJ, Sara, Jaelyn Brown, who's not here right now. She was scheduled to be here but has concussion-like symptoms. And then Chen Yue. Those are our four seniors, and a phenomenal group. I'm happy to be on this journey with them, and looking forward to answering your questions about this coming season.

Q. Charmin, Head Coach Charmin Smith, have you gotten used to hearing that yet?

CHARMIN SMITH: I guess so, yeah. I'm really comfortable. It's not something that I saw coming. You know, I don't know that any of us anticipated Lindsay leaving for the NBA, but it feels good to be back, and it feels right.

Q. Charmin, it's great to see you up there. With all your experience coaching under Tara VanDerveer and Coach Gottlieb and coaching in the WNBA, what do you think you're going to channel or what do you think you're going to channel when you're coaching?

CHARMIN SMITH: Yeah, that's a good question. I think I've been fortunate enough to work for and learn from a number of phenomenal coaches. Obviously Tara has known me the longest, being that she recruited me and I played for her. Spent some time with Cathy Inglese, just an extraordinary coach and person. And then Joanne Boyle and Lindsay Gottlieb, and finally in New York with Katie. I think I've taken something from each of them, and I see it come out in myself during different moments, depending on what I'm trying to accomplish, what I'm trying to instill in our team. And so I think it's just going to be a blend of everything in my past.

Q. Coaching in the WNBA and playing in the WNBA and playing overseas, what about that do you think

you're going to bring to your coaching experience and your players there at Cal?

CHARMIN SMITH: Well, any time you have a chance to really coach at the highest level, I think it really enhances your skills. And having the opportunity to work with Tina Charles and Bria Hartley, and Amanda Zahui B., just phenomenal professionals, and that was a great learning experience for me. And I think it also showed me that -- just reinforced that I do know how to coach this game. I have been doing it for a really long time.

Q. Coach, what have these last few months been like for you, going from Berkeley to the Liberty, back in the East Bay? Been a whirlwind for you?

CHARMIN SMITH: Yeah, more like a boomerang. I rented out my house. I thought I was gone. So when I first got back to Berkeley, I was staying with my neighbors looking outside of their window staring at my house that I own. That was interesting.

But it's been nonstop, just trying to get ready and do a great job of recruiting, and then also do a great job of prepping our team for what's to come with the season. And I'm excited that I'm actually enjoying those challenges; you know, hard work, fast pace. None of that has ever been something that I've shied away from, so we're handling it well.

Q. When Charmin was hired, there was so much discussion about this will be a seamless transition, she's been part of the program. Now that it's a couple months -- a few months into it, how smooth has this been and how special to have her back and running the show with a lot of familiar assistant coaches, as well?

SARA ANASTASIEKSA: I think it's been a really good transition. Charmin has always been that consistent coach that we've had, and she always comes in ready to work, like knows what we should be doing. And we want to work for her and all the other coaches, and I think it was probably the best possible thing that could happen for us because we know Charmin, we love Charmin, we've always loved her. So for her to come back, it was like incredible, and we couldn't have thought of anything better.

CJ WEST: Agree.

Q. Do you have anything you want to add?

CJ WEST: No, same.

Q. Charmin, just wanted to know in what ways are you going to be similar to Lindsay, and in what ways are your teams going to be different? And then for the players, how is she similar to Lindsay, and in what ways is Coach Charmin different from Coach Lindsay?

CHARMIN SMITH: You know, Lindsay and I coached together for, what, seven years or so; known each other for about 12 or 13 years. And so there are a lot of similarities in how we feel about the game of basketball, how we feel about empowering young women and what our purpose is in this sport, and I think that's where we are really strongly aligned. And I think that's why we worked so well together for so long.

In terms of the differences, I don't know. I just know me and what I need as a head coach and what's going to be important to me. And we've talked about it as a team, that the number one thing for me -- and it's really come out during this transition -- is just having people that are willing. Like that's my word. I want people who are willing. I want people who are willing to work for the program, work for their teammates. I want people who are willing to commit to being at Cal, being at the No. 1 public institution in the country, and people who are willing to compete.

And I think that's what I'm looking for. That's what I'm trying to pull out of our team consistently every single day, and I think as long as we have those pieces, we're heading in the right direction.

CJ WEST: I also think to build off what Sara touched on earlier, how consistent Charmin is and how every day she has a goal for us and we trust in her and she trusts in us to get done what we're supposed to get done. Yeah.

SARA ANASTASIEKSA: I think the differences between Charmin and Lindsay, just the personalities are inherently different. So Charmin is very like tough on us but in a good way, and she's very like attention to detail. That's what she's really into.

Q. For the players, just wondering, in your senior year just thinking about what you're hoping to get personally and also for the team this year. I know Sara, for example, you haven't played much due to injury, so I'd be curious to hear about what you hope for out of this campaign.

SARA ANASTASIEKSA: Yes, injuries really do suck. But it's kind of given me an outside view of everyone on the court, and being able to tell people, oh, this is the look that you should be making because I've seen it

so many times. And, yes, it's actually been really hard for me to make those looks, too, because I feel like that's -- it's a very in-game situation. I haven't had many of them.

But I think I play without fear, and I think I have a very aggressive mindset, a scorer's mentality. And I think that playing with the team right now, I've gelled really well and so have -- our freshmen have come in and given everything we've needed for them to give, so I'm really excited for our team and I'm ready to show everyone what I can do.

CJ WEST: For me, as well, I think my transition from freshman to sophomore and sophomore to junior year have been physical. And I think this year it's probably going to be a lot more mental, especially with the big role I'm stepping into, seeing as -- all the change that we've gone through. I think that my mindset has to change to be more aggressive. And my goal is to have more of a scorer's mentality and to realize that my role is a lot more impactful than maybe it was in the previous years, and also having a lot more confidence in myself, as well.

Q. You tweeted out the status with you doing some Muay Thai and said that if you can't do it, you won't ask your players to do it or something like that. First of all, how long have you been doing that? It looked pretty boss. And for the players, how hard is that to incorporate that into your workouts? Is it a challenge and do you get beat?

CHARMIN SMITH: So I've been doing Muay Thai for about four years now, and it's definitely my passion outside of basketball. I've found a whole new community. I have new teammates, new family with our Muay Thai minded family and Coach J. And it's been truly phenomenal and I've learned another level of discipline and commitment. The technique and the skill that it takes to learn the art of Muay Thai has definitely made me a better basketball coach.

And the tweet about not asking them to do anything that I'm not willing to do, I think my experience playing in the WNBA, playing at Stanford and going to Final Fours, like I hope that they trust in me because I've done it as a player. I want them to be able to hear me say like this is the way, and not just because I think so, but because I've actually experienced it.

CJ WEST: I also think that's the main reason why our relationship with Charmin is so strong is because she understands. She's been through every step that we've taken thus far. And going back to Muay Thai, it's really hard. We've done it twice. We've had like two sessions this year and last year, I think. And it was really fun, but it's really hard, and you have to really be locked in

mentally. But the payoff is amazing. The community that they have built and how they support each other in the process of learning and how willing you have to be to learn and open yourself up to new things is really nice, and it was a really, really good experience.

SARA ANASTASIEKSA: I wasn't able to do the Muay Thai, but it was crazy to see how when everyone got there, everyone was laughing. And then once it started, like the most serious faces I've ever seen. Everyone was really into it. You could tell everyone was gaining that discipline that Charmin always talks about, and now we'll have a greater understanding of why Charmin coaches the way she does and the discipline factor in her coaching.

Q. CJ, I'm curious, as a media studies major what this experience is like for you, the whole basketball media day?

CJ WEST: Unfortunately I've actually changed my major since then, so I'm actually a soc major now. But still, I think with what I want to do career-wise, having this media -- social media experience is really important for me. And I think nowadays it's important for everyone in the world that we're in today. It's still pretty impactful, maybe not if I was a media studies major, but yeah.

Q. Charmin, much is made of who you're losing, who you've lost in terms of your roster spaces. Unbelievable players, starters, both ends of the floor, et cetera, et cetera. How will you integrate some of the veterans coming back, asking them to take on an increased role, and also asking some of your freshmen to be impact players right away?

CHARMIN SMITH: Yeah, that's a great question. We've talked about it a lot, and what I've mentioned to them is that everyone in this program is in a new role. For me as a first-time head coach to every single player who's trying to do something really that they haven't done before. And what I think comes with that is an excitement, because now it's your turn, and it's your opportunity. And I think when people feel like they have opportunity, they're more willing to work. So we have a group that's just fired up because who's taking Kristine's minutes, who's taking AT's minutes, who's taking Reece's minutes.

There's a lot of opportunity out there, and I will tell you we have people that are very capable. You guys have not seen Sara play. I've seen her over the past few years on the guys' team, and when I was the associate head coach, I coached the practice squad. And so Sara was oftentimes with me, and I'm like, this kid can go. She can score. She's phenomenal. So I'm excited.

Our freshmen, I just have to start really not even by

talking about the basketball but as people. When you all get to meet Cailyn and Jazzy and E and Leilani, you're going to be blown away because they're phenomenal people, and really in my first year as a head coach, I would rather have that. I would rather have the culture and the character and the personalities and then worry about the talent. Fortunately enough, they're an extremely talented group, as well.

We've got great experiences. We don't have as much experience. But again, when you go back to people who are willing to dive in and do whatever the coach is asking them to do, whatever their teammate tells them to do, then I think we have the ability to surprise some people.

Q. As you took this job, now that you've had a couple months to digest and everything, what's the one thing you wish somebody would have told you before you said yes, I'll be the head coach?

CHARMIN SMITH: You know, I can't really think of anything where I'm just like, gosh, I wish I would have known. There have been a ton of things that I didn't know. Like Lindsay and I talk often, and I remember, I called her and said, did I ever ask you anything like this? Like I had questions coming to me, and I'm like, just kind of shocked at what people think they should ask, shouldn't ask. I don't know. There's just a lot of things that I've been like, wow, did I do that to Lindsay, did she feel that way when I said this, that, and the other. So we've had those types of funny moments.

But nothing has been extremely overwhelming or make me feel like, oh, shoot, I wish I would have known. We haven't played a game yet, but it's been all good, and I'm really excited about the opportunity.

Q. I wanted to know what aspects of your game you most focused on over the summer, and Charmin, is there any particular aspect of coaching you've focused on more as a head coach more than an assistant?

SARA ANASTASIEKSA: I think over the summer for me, the main goal has been to stay healthy. I just got healthy right before the summer, so my main goal was to be able to pretty much get into the role that Charmin needs me to. But also I do have a scorer's mentality, and I'm focusing on being able to finish with contact over some great defenders that we have in the Pac-12. So I think that's been my main focus.

CJ WEST: I'd also say similar to Sara is finishing through contact mostly. Yeah, just being able to finish through multiple people and be consistent with that because I feel like that's kind of the main thing that we're going to need.

CHARMIN SMITH: I think basketball-wise, I've been focusing a lot on special situations, just in that I'm going to be the one calling the shots, so I want to make sure that I'm prepared. And so we've added that into, I'd say, almost every single practice for the last 20 minutes. We're doing special situations. If we have a foul to give, what type of plays we're calling, who we're looking to get the ball to, those types of things. I just want to make sure we're all on the same page and we're all comfortable because this is our first year in with our defensive terminology, our offense. There's a lot of changes, so I want us to be as familiar and comfortable as possible in end of game situations.

And then for me off the court in terms of the coaching responsibilities, what I've learned is there's always something else coming. There's always some other thing. So like flipping out in the moment about something that's going on isn't going to help you, and just really trying to stay even-keeled. Because you think you have something under control and then someone is going to walk into your office and say, oh, this happened, and now you've got to be ready to deal with the next thing as a head coach.

Just trying to make sure that I stay consistent in terms of my personality and my reactions and don't let anything get me too emotional.