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An interview with:



THE MODERATOR: An opening statement from Notre Dame Head Coach Muffet McGraw.

OPENING STATEMENT

HEAD COACH MUFFET MCGRAW: "I'm happy with the way we are playing heading into this next round. I think we shook off a little rust in the first game, played better in the second and had some good practices in between. I'm really looking forward to this next game."

Q. Talk about your post players and how they have been able to step up in this tournament.

MCGRAW: "I was really pleased with their progress throughout the year. We've had some great games. Devereaux (Peters) has improved a lot throughout the year. I thought she was up for most improved player in the conference, as well as Natalie Novosel. To score as much as they did in the paint is really rewarding to see all of their hard work pay off. We've tried to work the inside game on a number of occasions and they've come up big for us."

Q. Can you talk about Oklahoma's Danielle Robinson and the matchup challenges she presents?

MCGRAW: "Well, she is an All-American point guard. She makes their team go. She is probably the fastest point guard we've seen all year and we've seen some really quick players. She is among the fastest in the country. She can get up-and-down the floor, she can defend, she's aggressive and she is the one who makes their team run offensively."

Q. Talk about the Oklahoma players you have not seen before, specifically Whitney Hand and Aaryn Ellenberg.

MCGRAW: "Whitney Hand is a great player. She is just one of the best shooters in the country. She has great size, so she can shoot over your guards. She is somebody who is like a Brittany Mallory, a glue player who has a lot of poise, leadership and enthusiasm for the game. She is a cheerleader for her team on-and-off the court. She makes them so much better. She gives them another weapon from the perimeter and just another steady poised player in pressure situations."

Q. When you play a transition team and you are a transition team, is that an advantage or would you rather play a different style of team?

MCGRAW: "I don't think we will need the shot clocks. Just give the guy a break tomorrow. I think it's going to be an up-tempo game. Both teams want to score quickly. Both teams are going to get a lot of shots up."

Q. The past two games against Oklahoma have both gone into overtime. Do you expect another game like that tomorrow?

MCGRAW: "I think the committee likes good television. This could be one of those games. We've had two great games in the past two NCAA Tournaments. Hopefully, this will be another one."

Q. Can you talk about Skylar Diggins and what she is like on and off the court?

MCGRRAW: "She is a coach's dream kind of player. She loves to watch film. She will come in the office regularly just to chat about the game. She is always watching games. She will text me watching two teams play that maybe we are not going to play or play down the road. She has kind of a scouting report on them on what she thinks and how we stack up. She is constantly into the game. She learns from the film and wants to get better. She is great in that way. Off-the-court, she is a DJ. She dances, she sings, she is a lot of fun. I think she has a great future ahead of her, no matter what she wants to do. She is a real people person and she loves to get involved in the community. The community really embraces her. She is the pride of the west side of South Bend. Everybody in town claims some sort of relation to her."

Q. Can you talk about Brittany Mallory and her development, especially as a defender and how she has grown into a leader?

MCGRRAW: "Coming into this season, I wasn't sure who our defensive stopper would be. We graduated Ashley Barlow and Brittany stepped up to the challenge. At the beginning of the year I go through what their expectations are for me and see what I think they will do. When talking about leading the team in steals, I thought her and Natalie Novosel would be the leaders. Brittany said 'put my name on that list.' She has guarded Maya Moore and Sugar Rodgers, Shenneika Smith and all of the top perimeter players in the BIG EAST. She loves that challenge. She wants to contribute in some way to the team. She is someone who doesn't get a lot of credit because it doesn't show up on the stat sheet for what she does. She has been so key in most of our close games. When she guarded (Keisha) Hampton from DePaul, she got a key steal with 15 seconds left to seal the game there. She's just made so many big plays from the defensive side."

Q. Talk about some of the role players on this team. Seems like there is a new hero each night.

"Natalie Achonwa came into the Connecticut game and I think had her first double-double of the season in the BIG EAST Final. She is a freshman who stepped up and delivered when we really needed it. She had a great game against Temple in the Second Round of the NCAA Tournament. She has a lot of poise. Definitely is someone who doesn't share the spotlight with some of the other players, but is just as important to our success. Kaila Turner comes off the bench and does a great job at the point. Fraderica Miller gives us so much energy. She is a player that makes things fun to watch when she is on the floor."

Q. Looking at Oklahoma's game on Tuesday against Miami, it looked like NCAA Tournament experience was a factor. How much of a factor is tournament experience?

MCGRRAW: "I think it makes a huge difference. It was very evident in that game from start to finish. I think this is a game where both teams have tournament experience. We've both been in this round before. It's great to have that experience, especially when everybody on your team, except for one player we are playing right now, have that kind of experience. The whole day of interviews, the crowd and different things you have to do, I think it's great to have gone through it before."

Q. Oklahoma had lost six of its previous 14 games heading into the tournament. From what you've seen, what is the thing that has turned around for them and what concerns you?

MCGRRAW: "Whitney Hand is similar to Devereaux Peters coming off an ACL injury. She wasn't 100 percent, but she gets better each game. I thought she had a great game against Miami. I think you see that and you see that her presence is so much better. Danielle Robinson, a senior point guard, is obviously been a good player. Their post game has improved. Aaryn Ellenberg is one of the best freshmen in the league. She has a year under her belt. They are a team that has improved tremendously throughout the year and are playing really good basketball right now."

THE MODERATOR: We will open it up to questions to the Student-Athletes.

Q. Skylar, can you talk about your growth from your first year to your second year?

SKYLAR DIGGINS: I think it is an experience thing. I got a lot of in game experience. Having a senior point guard, I got to talk to her a lot. She kind of handed it down to me, Melissa Lechlitner. This year, I've been watching three times as much film as I did last year, making sure I get in with coach, talking with coach, pick her brain apart, know what she wants. My assistant coach Niele Ivey has done a lot with me also because she was here. She knows coach. She knows how to run the team and the offenses they ran back then are the same ones we run now. My teammates did a great job helping me adjust to that. Talking to me. Giving me a lot of confidence. Demanding and wanting the ball. I mean when you play with girls like that, it's easy to be able to run the team because you know that any play you run, they are going to want the ball. They are going to put themselves in a great position for their teammates and themselves to score.

Q. Given how many times you've played each other, is it almost a rivalry?

BRITTANY MALLORY: I would say it is. We played them freshman year. That went into overtime. We played them last year in the tournament and also in the Virgin Islands. It's a little bit of a rivalry between us. It's going to be a good game. I think we are all ready for it to be a great game and just come out and be ready to play.

Q. Can you talk about guarding a player of the caliber of Danielle Robinson?

BRITTANY MALLORY: She's a great player. She's got a lot of speed. She creates for her teammates and she scores as well. We've just got to play great team defense and know who we are guarding at the time and keep her in front of us. She can get to the rim. She can create. She can score as well. We've got to do our best to keep her in front and not foul.

Q. Coach discussed earlier that she put together a list of who was going to be the team steals leader. You said, "Put my name on that list."

BRITTANY MALLORY: She had made that list, and I wasn't on the steals list. I kind of

took it a little personal. I wanted to be on that list. We are all competing for the steals. It's great when you can lock down the defender and either get a steal or get a tip on the ball where we get out in transition. I think that is one of the best aspects of our game is when we are out in transition. If we can get up and create a little chaos for our team, I think we are going to do well.

Q. Skylar, we asked coach about you off court, she said you DJ'ed. Can you tell us about that part of your life?

SKYLAR DIGGINS: I picked it up. My dad was a DJ. He ran our local record store. So he always put on sock hops and birthday parties and weddings, stuff like that. I was about 11 or 12. The equipment was always in the house. I got bored one day, and I started messing with the equipment, \$1000 equipment, started messing with it, started pushing buttons. He came home one day, and he was like 'Wow, you are really catching on to this.' I started doing my school parties, middle school parties, and high school parties. Then I got asked to do wedding receptions and birthday parties. Don't do it as much now because I don't have as much free time. My teammates know me as a music head. Do a little singing too.

Q. If you're at a wedding and need a go-to song, what's the go-to song?

SKYLAR DIGGINS: Since I'm still fresh off of Lady Gaga, I would have to say "Just Dance" would get them out there. Any cha-cha slides. I feel like everybody knows how to do that now.

Q. Natalie, talk about your year and being named Most Improved Player in the BIG EAST. You are playing with a lot of confidence.

NATALIE NOVOSEL: I think at the end of last year, I talked with Coach (McGraw). She just sat me down and said 'I want you to have a breakout year.' I felt like I didn't live up to her expectations the first couple of years, and I wanted to. I went home, and I was motivated to work the whole year. I wanted to start. I had the opportunity, with all the preparation that I had, I gained a lot of confidence in myself. With this whole year, I tried to stay consistent. I just tried to score. She told me to score and rebound. Every single game, I'm just gaining more confidence. Last year I was more of a role player. This year, I wanted to be a leader on the court.

Q. Sydney Smallbone is also from the South Bend area. Did you cross paths much with Sydney?

SKYLAR DIGGINS: We played on the same AAU team, played high school against each other. We haven't played in college. Sydney is a great player. It is amazing to see people from your hometown or around it or your teammates do well and their teams do well. It is fun to have the opportunity to match up with them. Sydney is a great player. She is doing great things at Tennessee. Their team and program are doing well also.

Q. Do you accept the idea that you will be in a transition game with Oklahoma?

BRITTANY MALLORY: We definitely want to stay in our transition game. We don't want to change the how we've been playing all year. Oklahoma's a great transition team. We just have to really stop the ball and find the shooters. They can really hit the three's and get to the rim. We've just got to keep Robinson in front of us and match up on the three-point line, and do the best we can to keep a hand out.

SKYLAR DIGGINS: I agree. (laughs)

Q. What do you see from Oklahoma recently?

SKYLAR DIGGINS: They have great additions to the program. You have Aaryn Ellenberg who is a great shooter. She's going to push outside. She is a very confident player. You've got Whitney Hand back who was an amazing player for not only Oklahoma but also had a great USA Basketball try out. I was there to watch all those people. You've got Danielle Robinson, who's a player, three-time Big 12 First Team and she's going to go. She's going to run. She's going to push tempo and find her shooters. Then you've got Carlee Roethlisberger, who's a great defender, a great rebounder, and also a great shooter. They have a lot of threats to their program. Then you have their big inside (Joanna McFarland) who's playing well now that Abi Olajuwon is gone. She's playing very well. She is a very physical post. And you've got new additions. Their freshmen, they have a lot of confidence. They are a dangerous team. Like Brittany said, the key is going to be our transition defense. They are better team off a make going, then off a miss. We have to find Danielle Robinson, and any ladders have to sprint to the three-point line and find the shooters. Yes, I watch a lot of basketball. I'm a basketball junkie, my

teammates can attest to that, and I text Coach a lot.

Q. Is Skylar a morning person? Where does she get her energy?

BRITTANY MALLORY: When I was rooming with her one time, my alarm went off. The second the alarm went off, she picked up the room phone. I'm like, 'No'. She's like 'anything that disrupts my sleep, it must stop immediately.' I wouldn't say she is a big morning person. It takes her a little bit to get up and going, but once she is up and going, she is up and going.

NATALIE NOVOSEL: It's funny. I've also roomed with her. And she's lying there, and when the alarm goes off, she bolts up and says 'okay I'm up!' It's weird. She just gets everything on very quickly. I'm just watching her. (laughs)

SKYLAR DIGGINS: She just says that because Natalie's the slowest moving person on the team. (laughs)