

April 4, 2010



Stanford – 73
Oklahoma – 66

An interview with:



THE MODERATOR: I'm pleased to welcome up to the podium Stanford head coach Tara VanDerveer and student-athletes Jayne Appel, Kayla Pedersen and Nneka Ogwumike.

COACH VANDERVEER: I first want to compliment Oklahoma on a great season and great job that Sherri Coale did with losing the Paris twins and Whitney Hand. To be in this game I think it speaks really well to their team.

And, you know, it was a battle and it was very physical. Obviously, I think, Nneka had a great game, and Jayne and Kayla battled in there. It was very physical. And I thought we did an excellent job really taking care of the ball.

But it was a little bit -- they made a great run. We stayed in there. But I was hoping that we could just kind of keep that space, keep that 14-, 15-point lead the whole way through.

But I thought our team worked hard, and we're very excited to be playing Tuesday night.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for our student-athletes.

Q. Nneka, Sheryl Swoopes scored 47 points in the '93 championship game. And other than her, you're now in second place in the Final Four among scorers. Were you aware

of that? Has anyone told you that yet? And what do you think about being in that company?

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: I wasn't aware of it, actually. But it's great to be considered one of the greatest. But I would have to say it's because of my teammates. Without them, I wouldn't be getting passes. I wouldn't be getting great screens from Kayla, passes from Jayne and all my guards.

But it's great, but there's more left, so...

Q. Nneka, did you have kolaches for breakfast?

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: No.

Q. Could you talk about that last play, the long pass that sealed the deal?

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: You know, it's one of several time-and-score situation plays that we go over in practice. And we ran it. I admitted to Coach and Kayla that I didn't think I would actually be open.

But Kayla asked Tara if she's open should I throw it, and I was open. And I thought it was an awesome play to run. It was definitely spur of the moment. A great coaching decision. We executed it right and it worked.

Q. Kayla and Jayne, from your vantage point, what does a 38-point night look like from your angle?

KAYLA PEDERSEN: Awesome.

JAYNE APPEL: Do it every single time.

KAYLA PEDERSEN: We're so proud of her. She really hung with it, especially in the first half. If we can get that out of her every game, we'll be happy with that. She was a monster down low and really helped us today.

JAYNE APPEL: I don't know if I can really add much to that. I think this is Nneka every game. Hopefully we can get it on Tuesday.

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: Might I say, though, I learned from the best, because I know no

one forgets Jayne's 46-point game last year. So I think I learned from the best and they helped me out.

Q. For any of you that would like to answer, maybe two, but did last Monday night's game, the way it was so tight, did that help when it got tight tonight? Did that help keep the composure and breaking the press and then sealing it?

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: I mean, no one really wants close games. But it's different -- it's different from preparing in practice for it and actually being in the game and it happening. Because time is on the line. And everything is at stake.

And so I think Monday definitely gave us that experience. Disregarding Monday, though, when games do get close, I think our team does an excellent job of staying composed and poised. And so we did a really good job of that tonight. And we just listened to the coaches.

And we had confidence in ourselves which caused us to extend the lead when the time expired.

KAYLA PEDERSEN: Yeah, Jayne just pointed out to me that we were winning the entire time, and I think that really helped. I mean, just knowing, guys, calm down, we're still up, we're still winning the game, it's all going to be okay.

So Jayne, like, saying that to us, she really helped us keep composure, and of course I think the Xavier game did help.

Q. I'm sorry, during the timeout Jayne --

KAYLA PEDERSEN: Jayne was always, Come on guys, like, You got it, you got it. We're fine. Just calming everyone down and making sure that we're all on the same page.

Q. Nneka, how many family members? What kind of an entourage did you have here? And did you ever imagine -- I know you have something left to do here, your job is not done, but did you ever imagine that your Texas homecoming would turn out like this?

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: Oh, absolutely. They never fail to mystify me. They're really good at supporting me. I always get texts. Even when I'm in California, I get texts, calls, e-mails. My high school coaches, my high school teachers, all of my immediate family is here. And I'm really glad that

Chiney also got to sit down there with them. And the support is wonderful.

And I'm not surprised at all how many people were there.

Q. Were you surprised you had this kind of a game?

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: Oh, I mean --

Q. For a Texas homecoming.

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: I just went out and played. I did whatever my team needed me to do. Everyone was giving me advice. I always tell: All of my teammates on the bench, they're always in my ear. They're always telling me good things to do. And my coaches are always giving me advice and helping me throughout the game.

And on the court I feel so comfortable with my teammates, and that I think helps in being successful in any way possible when we play.

Q. You were winning the game the whole game. But they won the second half. And I'd just like you to talk about what changes they made, what specifically they did that brought them back so close into the picture, that close to the game, and how did you respond to that?

JAYNE APPEL: I think they hit some outside shots that weren't falling for them in the first half. And they got some big rebounds on us. There was a series of a couple of plays where I think that we kind of, you know -- didn't box out. And I think they got some big boards on us.

I think those three rebounds were big ones for us and was kind of the difference in the second half.

Q. Nneka, can you remember a bigger game you've had on this big a stage?

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: For myself?

Q. Yes.

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: I mean, a lot of people come up to me about the Oregon game at Oregon. But, I mean, I honestly don't -- it's always good to reminisce. It's not really something I focus on.

I think about what was the result of the game. And we were in the locker room after the game, we were just getting pumped up and excited because we won.

I mean, there will always be individual performances, but I think it's all about the team.

Q. When you went down near the end of the game, what happened there?

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: Jeanette made an awesome pass to me, and I think McFarland -- is that her name? Yeah, McFarland, No. 53, was boxing me out before I came down.

And I honestly didn't know what was going on, but I kind of landed awkwardly.

Q. What part of your body?

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: Just upon impact, pretty much my whole body. But I shook it off and came back in.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Questions for Coach.

Q. Tara, when Sherri opened her comments she said they didn't have an answer for Nneka and I asked her is there an answer for Nneka. I would ask you the same thing: Is there an answer for Nneka?

COACH VANDERVEER: I thought Nneka played really well. And she really got the job done on the block for us. I think that she stepped up where maybe some -- like some shots for Jayne didn't go for her, some shots for other people on the perimeter didn't go.

But she battled, and what I was really excited about, this is a very physical game and Nneka got in there and kind of stood her ground in a physical game. I think it shows how much she's improved and how competitive she is.

Q. Assuming, Coach, that Connecticut advances out of its semifinal tonight, what will your team bring into that game that wasn't there when you met in December, that wasn't there last year?

COACH VANDERVEER: I think our team will bring confidence, knowing that we've improved a lot, and I think our team will be excited; if that in fact is who we play, they'll be excited about it.

We know we need to play better and shoot the ball better, but I think tonight against some very athletic and aggressive team we took care of the ball well. We got the ball to a hot player on the court.

We had some people missing some shots that really need to go for us in a routine. But I think our team will be really excited and will want to have a great game.

Q. Can you talk about what got Oklahoma back in the game?

COACH VANDERVEER: I think Jayne hit it. They had some shooters that knocked down a 3. Amanda Thompson made two of them, I think, in the second half. How many 3s did they make in the second half? They had four. Were all four in the second half? I mean, they hit some shots.

Roethlisberger hit one. And Thompson hit two. And then we were really working inside, and Hartman hit one.

But their 3-point shooting was about as bad as ours. Theirs was a little better.

Q. You said that you've seen Nneka mature in the way she handled herself in this physical game. One of her high school teachers or coaches described her as the kind of kid who would ask for permission before forgiveness, whereas other kids would do it the other way. Is that a part of her that you think has matured?

COACH VANDERVEER: She's always been mature in that way. Her game has matured. She's doing things less, I don't want to say mechanically, but she's confident. She's in the flow. She knows what we're looking for. She's playing with a lot of confidence.

And like last year everything was new for her. She had to learn a whole new set of plays and it took a while. But I think she finished really strong. She played very well in the tournament. And then this year she came in after her U.S.A. Basketball experience, her confidence being named Pac-10 player of the year, being named All-American. She showed why she's All-American. And I thought she had a great game.

Q. Was a point of emphasis going into the game to take advantage of your size and try to push them inside and did you kind of go to that more and more as the game wore on? Did you try to exploit that?

COACH VANDERVEER: I think there were a lot of things we wanted to do. First of all, we worked as hard as we could to keep Danielle Robinson in front of us. She's a great player. Local kid. I've known her since she was a little girl. And she's a terrific athlete. And just a great player and congratulations to Danielle for such an

outstanding year.

Stevenson is an excellent 3-point shooter. And Ros Gold-Onwude worked her tail off to make sure she didn't get 3s.

We were looking to help in off of their three players, and they brought in some kids that hit some shots, doubling in. I think that they were more physical than maybe I thought. I thought we had some times where we're going in and going inside and they really bodied them a lot, but we ran on them.

We got out and we ran, and I think it tired out especially their bigs, and a real credit to Jayne who has not been conditioning on the court. She really ran the floor really well. Made some great plays for us. Missed a couple layups but was running really hard for us and was, I thought, a great competitor.

Q. Can you talk about the baseball pass to Nneka at the end of the game?

COACH VANDERVEER: I called that play (laughter).

Q. That wasn't Amy?

COACH VANDERVEER: That was me. I don't know. I just felt like we had the speed advantage. And Kayla wouldn't throw unless she was wide open. And Nneka wasn't going to shoot it unless she was wide open.

You know, they were on a run and they were feeling some enthusiasm and some momentum. So I think that kind of slammed the door.

The other one Nneka had is the overhead pass to Jayne, was how did she get so wide open? I have no idea. But you're not going to -- a team like Oklahoma got down and to their credit they came back. But we've seen that from them all year long. They've been battlers all year long.

Q. My second question, without sounding like the wet blanket, your guards were 4 for 18. Can you beat Connecticut with guards that shoot 4 for 18?

COACH VANDERVEER: 4 for 18. That doesn't sound too good. I think I have confidence in our guards. I have confidence in how Ros is playing and Jeanette, and I think if we're playing Connecticut or Baylor, whoever it will be, we're playing for a national championship. And these kids will -- I think they'll really come out and play and relax and just knock them down.

I have confidence -- I thought JJ took a good shot. Kayla is taking good shots. Our team was taking good shots. We weren't taking bad shots. Joslyn is a great shooter for us.

Some of it is maybe just getting used to playing in this dome. Maybe -- they didn't shoot that well either. I don't know how these guys are shooting out here. But I have confidence in our perimeter shooting, and I'm excited to be playing.

I'm absolutely thrilled for this team to come this far. And I know that if we get those looks, they will knock them down.

Q. Tara, can you talk about just going through emotionally wrenching games as you have?

COACH VANDERVEER: You know, this is what makes the struggle, that makes it fun. Honestly, I don't know. I mean, it makes it challenging. And it brings us together. This is a team that has had to -- we've had to rally a little bit in situations. And I really feel that our preseason schedule, our run right through the Pac-10 has people very confident, has people very close. This is a team that whatever happens on Tuesday night is all good.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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