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An interview with:



AMY YAKOLA: Joined by Stanford head coach Tara VanDerveer as well as student-athletes Jayne Appel and Jillian Harmon.

Coach, when you're ready, an opening statement.

COACH VANDERVEER: First, I'd just like to congratulate Connecticut on a great game. They have a terrific team, and I thought it was a really outstanding individual performance by Renee Montgomery.

And, second, I'd like to just extend my congratulations to Stanford and to especially Jill and Jayne being up here, having just a fabulous season, a team I'm really proud of. And I really liked how our team battled. This was a very tough night for us.

We did not shoot the ball well at all. We struggled turning the ball over. We worked very hard defensively, and were in great position and took away a lot of the things we needed to do. They still made some shots.

And our team, especially with the leadership of Jill and Jayne, competed for 40 minutes and represented themselves and our team and our university in a way that I'm exceedingly proud of.

AMY YAKOLA: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Jayne, through much of the first half and a fair portion of the second half, they seemed to have you playing much further out from the basket than I've seen in the last five games I've watched you. Late in the game you were able to get much closer to the hoop. And the scoring picked up. What were they doing and what changed?

JAYNE APPEL: I think they came out with a game plan to be very physical, always have a body on me and push me out away from the block. As the game went on I just kept trying, kept trying to get in as deep as possible and as close to the basket as possible. Just kept trying to wear them down, I guess, and tried to give myself the best opportunity to score.

Q. Jill, was it a frustrating start? There were some quick turnovers and you guys were having trouble moving the ball around. Then it was 14-13, then they went on a run. Was that not the start obviously that you guys wanted?

JILLIAN HARMON: It was definitely a disappointing start. UConn is a great team and they played a great game. They hit shots. We didn't hit many shots. But I'm so proud of the way our team stayed with it. We were positive for the whole 40 minutes, and it's an honor to be a part of this team.

Q. Jill, can you just talk about this being your last game?

JILLIAN HARMON: I don't know how -- it's been a great four years. I couldn't have asked more. The best coaches in the world. Best teammates. To have it come to an end is a bit surreal. I was balling my eyes out in the locker room not because we lost the game but because I can't play with these ladies again. But I know they'll come back next year and hopefully be at the Final Four and hopefully I'll be here to watch.

Q. Jill, can you step back and play coach for a second. What would you tell your teammates for next year?

JILLIAN HARMON: Just to work on things they need to work on, to remember this loss and have it motivate them. I think our loss last year in the championship game really motivated us just to improve.

And I know everyone on our team can do that. And I know this team will be back strong.

AMY YAKOLA: Thank you. Questions for Coach.

Q. Will you talk about those first maybe 10 minutes of the game, how things went and what kind of hole it put you in?

COACH VANDERVEER: I think, well, first of all, as somebody already mentioned, it was extremely physical, in terms of the amount of contact on Jayne. I mean, just -- every time she came down totally pushing her off the block.

And so that created a situation where she then -- she was easier to double because she was closer to the perimeter people. And we did turn it over. We did miss shots that we needed to make.

I thought we were doing a really good job defensively. We rebounded well, but our offense was -- we were taken out of our offense by the physicality inside. And they're extremely aggressive and quick on the perimeter.

And we just, you know -- we took some bad shots, I thought, early. Some quick shots. We missed some shots that we needed to make. And we had too many turnovers.

At the same time, they did go -- they went on a run where like one time we just totally lost Montgomery. And honestly, for their team, they really capitalized on anytime -- for the most part anytime someone was open -- like the first play of the game, Hayes was left open. She knocked down a 3.

And we weren't open that much. But we have to help ourselves more by knocking down shots and making free throws. There's certain things that as a team we have to do to be able to stay in it.

We had some open shots we needed to knock down. Had some free throws that we needed to knock down.

Q. Coach, Nnemkadi spent more time on the bench than she typically does in a game.

Was it part of your strategy to sort of pick up more guard play?

COACH VANDERVEER: Are you talking about Nnemkadi Ogwumike? Nnemkadi Ogwumike played really well. And she's averaging about 25 minutes. She played about the amount of time that she was playing. Defensively it was the toughest matchup for her guarding Maya Moore. And a couple times she asked for a sub. She's young and she was tired. But I thought she did a great job when she was in there.

And also some of the things that they were giving us were kind of more to be spread out, and for her to make better decisions on the perimeter and I think as she gets more experience, to be able to hit more of a high post shot and a perimeter shot, I thought she did a great job for us. So she rebounded. She scored. And she really competed well for the time she was in there.

Q. Can you just reflect on the whole season? You lost your best player, Candice Wiggins, to graduation, lost your point guard but yet you made it to the semifinal game. And even though this was a bad loss, at this point can you put it all in perspective?

COACH VANDERVEER: I mean, Connecticut is a terrific team. One of the disappointments that I had was as soon as I looked at the bracket -- in some ways it's like, I mean, I really feel like we could compete on a really good basis with the other two teams that were here, whether it's Oklahoma. But Connecticut was head and shoulders above us tonight.

And what I wanted to make sure with our team was this one game in some ways did define us but in some ways it did not define us.

The best thing that happened was the fact that when things were not going our way, our kids really -- they stayed with things really well. They competed. They weren't sniping at each other. They didn't have excuses when they came to the bench.

I was so proud of that. Now, it was very difficult. We didn't do some of the things that we needed to do or we wanted to do.

But we've really grown up a lot this season. And to have Jayne in there. She really was an All-American in how she kept demanding the ball. Totally getting bodied out and stayed with things really well.

We have a very, very young team and we do not have the guard leadership that Connecticut had. I thought Jeanette filled in really well, but there were times tonight when we just didn't have the let's set things up and let's run things that we needed.

But for the whole season, for our team to be playing in the Final Four with what we've been through, I'm exceedingly proud. I just can't even -- I have to pinch myself, say, We're in the Final Four. And I just think that our team will build on this experience and it will set in that, wow, you get here, and we want to do better.

Q. You've been coaching for a while. How good is this Connecticut team? There's been four other undefeated teams in the history of this sport. You've seen a bunch of them, if not all of them. How good is this team? Where does it fit in?

COACH VANDERVEER: Tonight, I thought they played really well tonight. They don't have -- maybe they don't have a lot of depth, but they don't need it. They play Renee Montgomery. They shoot the ball really well. And they defended us very well. They're extremely aggressive. They are extremely athletic.

I don't know about the hyperbole about the greatest team, whatever, whatever. It's comparing -- how can you compare? How can have you Diana Taurasi come back with that team? Geno would know best.

But they're on a mission. And I think coming out and beating them last year, they've dedicated themselves. Renee Montgomery has improved tremendously. Maya Moore is a great player. But I think she was really the difference-maker, and I told Geno after, I said, That's the Player of the Year right there. She's phenomenal.

And their whole team, they stepped up and made plays that they had to make, and they don't make a lot of mistakes. They don't take bad shots. They play within the flow of the game and they play with a purpose.

Q. You mentioned in a conference several days ago your preference for not coaching an undefeated team and how you're uncomfortable with that and your ability to take lessons from defeats. With a young team and so many players returning next year, what lessons do you think those young players can take out of this defeat today?



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COACH VANDERVEER: I think that's a great question. I mean, what they saw today either out there or from the bench was a team that has great athleticism, but they're in terrific shape. They run, and they set screens. They're very physical.

I think that they're very skilled. The ability to put the ball on the floor and go to the basket. We had players go in and the ball was taken right away. I think players on our team are going to -- if we want to be at this level, if we want to compete for a national championship, I think there are a lot of young players who can say, boy, I can get in the gym and I can improve and I can help our team. And hopefully either from not playing or from even playing and saying I can do better, I can help our team more.

Being better 3-point shooters, we didn't shoot the ball well from 3. We weren't as physical as we needed to be. So, again, this is -- Connecticut's a young team in a way, take away Renee Montgomery, they've got a lot of young players, too.

In order for us to compete with them, we're going to have to really work hard in the off-season in the same way they did.

Q. I know it's very soon after a loss. But do you have two or three things in your mind that you know you want to work on for next season with the group you've got coming back?

COACH VANDERVEER: I think that there are some real positives to be gained from this game, I think, anytime you come to the Final Four. But I think that people will leave with a sense of feeling great accomplishment of coming, but a great disappointment in not playing better.

I would say the number one -- we have to shoot the ball better. We have to take care of the ball. We have to be in better condition to be able to run. We have to be better skilled in handling the ball and less turnovers, knocking down shots. And through our season we have not shot the ball well from the perimeter. And that's something that we have to improve.

But I think that that's something that we can do. And players will put the time into that. But I would just say basic skills. Fundamental skills of ball handling, passing, shooting, conditioning, and putting time in in the off-season.

Q. Following up what you just said.

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When you get in the Pac-10, you've got two other teams that are pretty high level with you, you've got others that are developing. And you go for that long stretch. And I think of some earlier years, the Texas teams and the Southwest conference that play well early and not see a lot, and then you don't see it until you get here. Would it be helpful to like get an out-of-conference game in late February or just give a team a sense of what's ahead?

COACH VANDERVEER: Our schedule next year is really as competitive, but we don't have that gap. We played Cal in the first game. So we played two games all the way through with the Pac-10. And I think the Pac-10 -- I don't feel that the Pac-10 did not get us ready. I will say this, the physical play that was allowed in this game was different than what -- but I've said that all year long. When we came back East and we played Duke, we had Eric on that game. When we played Tennessee. Next year we're opening at Old Dominion. Rutgers, we play Tennessee, Duke, Gonzaga, Utah.

We go to Connecticut. We're starting a home and away with Connecticut. So we're playing as tough a schedule as an assistant coach could give a head coach. So I think the main thing for us is to at this point be able to take positive things from our trip here, and I think our team will.

And it's been a phenomenal experience. We're thrilled to be here. We want to compete better, but I'm really proud of our team and how well we've done.

AMY YAKOLA: Thank you, Coach.

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