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An interview with:



AMY YAKOLA: Joined up here by head coach Gene Auriemma, as well as student-athletes Maya Moore and Renee Montgomery. Coach.

COACH AURIEMMA: Well, all I can say is going into this game I was very nervous about how we were going to be able to guard Jayne Appel and how we were going to defend Stanford in general.

I wasn't that concerned about how many points we would score. I thought we could get our shots. But I can't say enough about the defensive effort that these kids put forth tonight. And these two players right here were just unbelievable, and they just were determined to play one more game, to be in Tuesday night's game.

I said to Renee, I wanted you to play in your last game of your college career to be the last game. And this is the first time that she's had a chance to do that, and I'm really happy for her, as I am for everybody else on our team.

AMY YAKOLA: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Renee, sum up your individual performance as well as your thoughts about getting to the title game, please.

RENEE MONTGOMERY: My thought process was simple the whole game. Coach broke

it down, just get a score and a stop. And the whole time, every time they shot the ball, if it went in or didn't go in, I was thinking we've got to get the ball up the floor quick.

That was my thought process the whole game, and we have to get a lot of stops and pressure the ball on defense.

Q. Thoughts on the title game?

RENEE MONTGOMERY: I'm excited to have another Big East championship game. That's exciting. I know they're definitely not going to be the same team we played before. Everyone gets better and everyone plays a whole lot better in the tournament.

So right now both of us are 1-0. And I'm happy for another Big East team to make it to the championship game, and me and Angel have been talking along the tournament and we actually was hoping each other would meet, and I guess now, you know, we did it and may the best one win.

Q. Renee and Maya, how satisfying was this win for you considering that they knocked you out last year and maybe both of you didn't have your best games against them?

MAYA MOORE: It feels good to make progress. And I feel as a whole our team is better, and we were more prepared this year to compete against Stanford.

And we knew coming in that they were going to fight. They were going to be disciplined. They were going to run. They were going to be aggressive, as you saw. They didn't stop the whole game. They crashed the boards, they ran the floor hard.

If anything, we knew what we had to do to beat Stanford. So I'm just happy the way everybody contributed tonight. If you look at the stats, really balanced and I couldn't ask for anything more than just everybody stepping up and doing what they're good at.

RENEE MONTGOMERY: I completely agree. I just think that I'm just excited about how



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my teammates stepped up in the big moments just to get us here. I think everybody came in, they knew what they had to do and everyone did their part no matter how big or small it was. That's just the most fulfilling part.

Q. Maya, can you just address the defensive effort on their role players compared to last year, how you shut down Pohlen and Pedersen and Harmon, they killed you last year, and what were you able to do this year that you weren't able to do last year?

MAYA MOORE: That was part of the game plan, too, make sure we guard the 3-point line. Which I thought we did a very good job of up until a little bit in the second half. Because that's what hurt us last year.

They were getting inside with Jayne, she's a great player, she's going to score. We tried to make it tough for her. But if other people start getting involved, it gives the whole team momentum that way. So we just tried to do a good job recovering back on them, trying to make it tough for them, pressuring them, and it worked.

Q. Renee, do you ever surprise yourself with your capacity to come up big in important situations like this?

RENEE MONTGOMERY: I think it's just practice. I think every day in practice I practice to be able to step up in the big moments, and that's why you put yourself in every drill, to be able to, when your teammates need you, hit the big shot or drive.

You just feel completely comfortable and ready when you've practiced hard every day to come in in a big game and perform. I think it's just work ethic that gives you confidence. So, yeah, it's definitely work ethic.

Q. Maya, you guys talked up here yesterday about how uncomfortable Stanford made you last year. Do you feel like you guys made them uncomfortable early in the game tonight?

MAYA MOORE: I like to think so. I was really proud of my teammates for just stepping up and just really putting pressure on the guards and doing a good job of trying to help each other.

I think one of the best moments in the game was the ball was on the sideline in front of their bench and Renee I think Kalana or Tiffany, you guys just trapped and just pressured the guards. It was the game plan executed perfectly.

So just for Coach to come and tell us to do something and we go out and do it, it just feels great. Especially right here in the Final Four.

Q. Maya, can you just talk about the sense of comfort you have playing with Renee when she's locked in the way she was today?

MAYA MOORE: It feels great, just to know that even when I make a crazy decision or throw up a horrible shot I know Renee's going to come back the next time and make something good happen.

So she definitely -- her presence on the court gives us confidence, and when she comes in and plays like herself, is patient, aggressive, attacks the hole, everybody, just lifts everybody. That's an important part of our team, our point guard, and I really feel like she's led us this way, and we have all the confidence in the world in her.

Q. Maya, it was 14-13. What was Stanford doing early on and what did you guys do defensively to stop them and go on that run?

MAYA MOORE: In the beginning of the game, both teams are going to battle. It's one of those things where we just can't get -- try to get a 20-point lead off of one shot.

So it was going up and down. Stanford was running the floor really hard. And we had to adjust to that and get back in transition. They were getting some transition buckets. Once we started containing them that way, that helped defensively, and then offensively we just found an open guy. Tiffany hit some big shots, Kalana hit some big shots. When everybody's contributing like that, our momentum just swings and that's when the lead -- we separate from other teams.

Q. Renee, how much was last year's game against Stanford like just in the back of your mind all season long, like as you went through all those drills and did all the hard work to get back here?

RENEE MONTGOMERY: Stanford wasn't the only team on our minds. You think back to all of our losses, that was probably the only team in her mind because it was her first loss in the tournament. But I think back to when we lost to Duke and LSU, you don't forget losses. Stanford was the most fresh loss, but you just think back to all the years where you fell short.

And you just push yourself harder because you know you need that extra 2 percent in the Final Four. You need that extra everything when it comes down to the Final Four. And we kept on falling short. So you have to change something when you're not successful, and I think all the losses that I've had in my career just got me to where we are here today.

AMY YAKOLA: Thank you both. Congratulations. Questions for Coach.

Q. Coach, I know you know Renee so well. Do you have a sense -- when you see her before a game or you chat with her before a game, can you read her mind, you know what she's thinking? Do you have a sense of what she might do over the next 40 minutes?

COACH AURIEMMA: Pretty much. I think we all do on our team, all of our coaches are very aware of that. It's not just right before the game, it's the day leading up to the game. It's everything that she does.

A performance like tonight is almost what I've come to expect from Renee in any meaningful, big game, because that's who she is. And she's absolutely right about -- I don't think there was a drill this year at any one time that I can remember where she didn't treat that drill like it was for the national championship.

Every dribble move, every coming off a screen, you know, every single thing that she did was at that level every day. And when you do that, as she said, you expect to be in this position. And that's what you're planning for.

She's Renee Montgomery, you know? She's just really good.

Q. Geno, 38 games in, does this team continue to impress you by the way it executes and responds in situations such as this?

COACH AURIEMMA: Yeah. Yeah. We talked about that before the game. We talked about that when you believe in yourself and you believe in each other and in the group how you know that the person sitting next to you and the one behind you and the one in front of you have all invested the exact same amount and are going to be there for you, it's a real comfort level. It's something that all great teams share and it allows you to withstand the other teams making shots, your missing shots.

It allows you to withstand anything. They're just really intertwined and really connected right now and they have been since September.

My job's been much easier this year than the last three or four years in terms of knowing that they're ready to play.

Q. Geno, last time you were in St. Louis, it was a similar situation. First half you dominated. It was 13 or in that range and you guys didn't come out in the second half and finish the job. Did you bring that up with them or compare how this team was able to come out in that second half and just lock up on them defensively and take this game over?

COACH AURIEMMA: Actually, I didn't bring up our game with Notre Dame in 2001. In the locker room I brought up the Louisville/Oklahoma game that was played right before us. Oklahoma is up 12 and we're up 13, and at this time of the year, you know, there's no recovering from a bad five, six, seven, eight, ten minutes. There's no getting it back.

So I thought if we would come out in the second half and put together a real good five-minute spurt that it would be hard for Stanford to come back from that. And they helped us. I mean, they missed some shots and we took advantage of it.

But I haven't really mentioned anything about the Notre Dame game back here in 2001. We're on the same bench as we were then. We're in the same locker room as we were then. There's a lot of similarities. But I'm trying not to burden them with that.

Q. How satisfying is it to get back a win from a team that beat you last time?

COACH AURIEMMA: I like Tara, you know? And I respect what she's done and I've always had great admiration for the way she coaches and the kids she gets to go to Stanford and play. And so that really didn't enter any of it. No more satisfaction beating Stanford than it would have been Oklahoma or Louisville in the semifinal game.

The feelings are more about I don't want this team to come up short. I don't want them to stop playing. I wanted them to be in the championship game. Who we had to play to get there was really not even an afterthought. I was more scared and more nervous rather than looking for some satisfaction for beating them.

They're a hard team to play against, and any time you beat Stanford, you've accomplished a

great deal.

Q. Since you brought up the Oklahoma/Louisville game at half, how astonished or breathtaking was Louisville's comeback in that second half, and does that familiarity give you any sense of what exactly going into the championship game?

COACH AURIEMMA: I wish we were playing anybody but Louisville Tuesday night. Anybody. I don't care who. And the reason I say that is -- at least we're going to have a Big East national champion. So that's a good thing.

The bad thing is the last team you want to play is a team that you beat the way we beat them the two times we played them. And especially the last time we played them.

So when I saw what they did today, I was not surprised. I wasn't surprised they beat Maryland. I wasn't surprised they got here. We've seen them play. I've seen what Angel can do, by herself, just take over games.

For them to only be down 12 and she hadn't scored yet, you know, Oklahoma's in trouble. They're up 12, but they're in trouble because Angel hasn't scored yet.

So the familiarity works both ways, you know? They know us as much as we know them.

Q. Is this the most satisfying get to the championship game since you have Renee who hasn't been there before? I mean, you've had a lot of titles and a lot of teams make to it the championship, but is there something about her that this is for her to get a championship and put her name with the other incredible players to come through UConn?

COACH AURIEMMA: Yeah, yeah, I've kind of felt that from the very first one. I don't mean to go into the history of Connecticut basketball, but in 1991 I just wanted to go to the Final Four because I had a couple seniors that were just responsible for building our program.

Then in '95 I really wanted Rebecca Lobo to go out as a national champion. And the same with Sue and the same with Diana. You love when your best players, the ones that have given their heart and soul to your program and have accomplished so many things for themselves individually, for your team, for their teammates, I don't think there's anything greater than winning your last college game. I don't know that there's anything that could possibly top that.

And I tell my players this all the time. It's not about me or my coaches or the University of Connecticut or the fans that are out here. They might not want to hear that, but it's not about that. Because if we were playing in front of nobody at midnight, it would still be the same. It's about the players that are doing it and how they're going to remember their experience at Connecticut.

If you're Renee Montgomery and we would be fortunate enough to win Tuesday night, that would be like waking up from a dream with a smile on your face for the rest of your life. I just can't imagine that it could get any better than that.

AMY YAKOLA: Thank you, Coach.

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