

April 1, 2012



Baylor – 59
Stanford – 47

An interview with:



THE MODERATOR: Joining us now, head coach Tara VanDerveer from Stanford and student-athletes Nneka Ogwumike and Toni Kokenis.

Coach, an opening statement.

COACH VANDERVEER: I'd like to congratulate Baylor. They have an excellent team. We worked very hard. We prepared really hard. But at the end of the day they outplayed us, and they have some great players and really outstanding coach in Kim Mulkey.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Nneka, can you talk about how you're feeling right at this moment and was it a matter of you guys not knocking down shots? Do you feel you'll walk away and say we didn't hit enough shots?

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: Obviously no one feels good after a loss, especially if it's in the Final Four. But I just kind of look back and reflect on what it took for us to get here, and I would have rather gone down with my team than up with any other team.

But when it comes down to the game, if you look at it, yeah, we were 20 for 60, that's a lot. And I know I didn't make one 3, and I shot five of them.

And I think in the first half -- Tara made a really good point at halftime. She said I was settling for my shot. Because during the week we worked on kicking it out, kicking it out, kicking it out. But when I started attacking in the second half, I was able to go one-on-one against.

But ultimately I think also it was kind of difficult for us to really figure out what we wanted to do on offense. I think we were too worried about her.

But in reality attacking her wasn't as hard as we thought it would be. And hitting shots is always what it comes down to. We were 2 for 17 from the 3. Granted, five of those were mine.

But I think it's a good thing for our youngsters to look back and reflect on what it really takes to get over this hump.

Q. Toni and Nneka, did you guys feel that you came close to executing the game plan that you wanted to do, but when you missed that many 3-pointers it's tough?

TONI KOKENIS: I think we were really well prepared for this game. We had a great game plan, and we were executing it. We just struggled a little bit offensively and missed some shots that would have definitely helped us, like a few 3s that we stepped out of bounds a few times.

And I think also their offensive boards kind of hurt us, and we needed to box out better and get more rebounds because they got too many second-chance points.

Q. Did you feel that the strategy of bringing each possession down to the end of the shot clock? I mean, although it worked, in terms of shortening the game, it forced you into some difficult shots, more than you probably would have wanted. Is that accurate?

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: Yeah, we weren't trying to run the clock down.

Q. But you didn't take shots until the end of the shot clock repeatedly.

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: If we could score earlier, we would. But their defense was -- it's tough. Having in the paint, it completely changes everyone's game. Not just the inside players' game. Attacking the basket is a little more difficult, as you saw. Toni and Amber were trying to get in there, and you kind of have to think about making an extra pass. Your first instinct is to shoot.

But, besides that, Odyssey's pressure, obviously she got some steals. Destiny Williams got a steal. And it's not -- it's not like we were trying to run the clock down. It just kind of happened, and obviously those aren't the shots you want, but I think we tried our best to really compose ourselves on offense, even though it was really difficult.

Q. Nneka, you kind of talked about settling for your shot in the first half. I don't know if it was the plan or if what you saw was open, but looked like you were attacking more in the second half.

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: Definitely. I think I -- when Tara mentioned, I realized yeah, I am settling, because this whole week we talked about driving the baseline, kicking across the baseline or kicking behind you. And so the pick-and-roll, we didn't think, would work as well. Because 's in there. I thought if I start hitting some outside shots, they will come out on me.

But they were flying out on me regardless. My coaches helped me realize that. In the second half I started attacking. When I realized it wasn't that hard to score against her, I was like: Give me the ball, give me the ball.

But also we needed to try and get offensive rebounds so we could kick it out to our shooters.

Q. Neka, can you expand on what you said about attacking her wasn't as hard as you thought it would be? How much of playing is a psychological thing where it's really scary to think about doing it and talk about what the reality of it was like; that it wasn't as difficult?

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: I think it actually was kind of -- I was definitely psyching myself out. I think I was kind of too into myself in the first half, feeling I needed to fire, fire, fire, but Tara's always told me if I'm shooting, who is rebounding.

When they told me at halftime just attack -- because first play of the game I think I got the ball

and I attacked I missed the layup, but I was able to get a shot off. And in the second half I just started attacking. I was like, okay, this isn't that bad.

And I think it is mostly psychological. Granted, Griner, she has over 200 blocked shots, more than our whole team combined, on her career. That's amazing.

But I think if you put your mind to it, and I think I did a really good job of not being scared of going in there. And my teammates had my back. I think Chiney did a good job of rebounding, even Amber, you saw Amber get a tip back, that's awesome.

It's the Final Four. Even if it wasn't the Final Four, when you go out there you want to leave it all on the court. And I tried my best to play as hard as I could in whatever situation I was.

Q. Toni there was a sequence, Bonnie hit the 3 but she stepped out of bounds and Chiney with the offensive foul and Nneka fouled on the other end. It was an 11-1 swing. Did that feel like a pretty tough sequence for you?

TONI KOKENIS: Yeah, that hurt us because those were plays if it had gone the other way it would have been at least a little more momentum or kept the game closer, especially like a 3 or a fastbreak layup. Those are both momentum plays and to be right there and obviously not be able to finish or have them taken away was difficult, and we just weren't able to overcome the hump of that stretch of plays later in the game.

Q. Notre Dame doesn't have nearly the size that you have. Is there any way that they can stay with Baylor on Tuesday?

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: I mean, they may not have the size, but I think Devereux is one of the best post players I've played -- I can only say "with" because I played with her in USA. And Kayla McBride, she's a brute. When we were watching tape -- was it on West Virginia? -- she was guarding Bussie and Dunning, and I don't doubt it will be a good game on Tuesday.

And just regarding the fact it's and then they don't really have as strong of an outside, you have Skylar Diggins, you have Natalie Novosel, you have Brittany Mallory, and obviously Natalie Anchonwa and everyone that comes off the bench.

I look forward to watching it. I'm going to

watch it. I think it's going to be a great matchup on Tuesday. I think it's going to be interesting to see -- it's a rematch as well. I think it will be interesting to see -- Baylor's a great team; Notre Dame's a great team -- to see them match up.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Questions for Coach.

Q. In the end, why do you think you guys didn't win this game?

COACH VANDERVEER: Well, in just looking at the stats, as an example, we shot one more field goal, made one more field goal than them. We sent them to free-throw line.

If you look at everything else, I mean, our assists are the same, turnovers the same. We had more blocks than they did.

I think there were some momentum plays. The big momentum play was the foul on Chiney driving in there.

Honestly, you never know what's going to happen in games, but the game before ours seemed to be extremely physical. And this game was just the opposite to me.

But I think the main thing was we sent them to the free-throw line. And I don't think we should have with the game plan we had. We're totally off of either No. 3 or 20. And 20 hit some big shots. She hit one 3. She's made ten all year. She had a couple of shots for them that she stepped up nicely. I think she gave them some momentum. But the free throws, that was a big thing.

Q. Nneka just said it wasn't part of the game plan to run the clock. But the other day you said that you wanted to slow the tempo of the game.

COACH VANDERVEER: No, I didn't ever say that. The question was put to me like did you learn from what other people did, and I said yes.

We wanted to run on them, but we really didn't get out and go as well as we wanted to. They make things hard in terms of running your offense, so they take you out of doing your normal thing. So to try to get into alignment, to try to get to do things, it took us that long to get the floor organized and to be able to run our offense.

And I thought we got some -- the first half we had some turnovers I didn't like. We had some fouls I didn't like. But we really -- we had some nice open looks and didn't knock down shots.

Q. You talked about No. 3 and 20, Condrey and Madden, knocking down shots. With Baylor do you almost have to pick your poison, try to stop inside and maybe let them take some outside shots?

COACH VANDERVEER: That was -- if I were to do it again, I would probably do it the same way. I think there was -- like the first play of the game Madden just drives in for a right-hand layup. That was not part of the game plan.

That was we're guarding her going to the rim. There were other possessions where some of the turnovers that led to baskets. You have to keep them in front.

And I think our team -- it took a lot of focus, and I think our team did a good job, but we had to do a better job. I think Nneka -- just I was happy with our defense. They shot, what, 30 something percent. But except for our fouling.

And I just -- honestly I just didn't see it. We're not that a physical a team. We've never had anyone foul out all year. And I was just like -- it's just different.

Q. I want to make sure I understand this correctly. You were not trying to take the full 30 seconds?

COACH VANDERVEER: Correct.

Q. But your team just couldn't find the shots; it seemed very deliberate, a lot more deliberate than normal.

COACH VANDERVEER: I think they force you that way. We tried to get out and go. We tried to push the tempo a little bit. Honestly I think Amber got a little tired. And we just -- we weren't able to run our offense the same way. You just can't make passes that you usually make. You can't attack in the same way you're used to attacking.

Although, I think finally I just said to Nneka: You've got to get the ball and take it at. She did and drew some fouls and scored. But we didn't really get much -- Nneka didn't get much help. Usually it's been Nneka and Chiney. We needed more help for Nneka.

People needed to pick up offensively. Amber going 1 for 9; Jos, 1 for 6. We had some good looks. We needed to knock them down. But we're not trying to hold the ball on them.

Q. It's easy to see you were

double-teaming , but can you describe in some detail exactly what the strategy was with her? Was it just as simple as muscling her and fronting her sticking two people on her?

A. It was always the person that was guarding either 3 or 20 was leaving them and just sagging in front or doubling in on her. We knew we didn't want to leave -- other teams had left -- most teams always put two people on her. And other people had left Odyssey Sims and she would light them up. They'd leave Hayden and she would light them up.

We said we're going to leave those two and gamble off Madden. Besides her first layup, basically she was like 3 for 10. So that was -- I thought that was a good gamble, 0 for 2 from 3. But Condrey came in and hit a couple of shots. And Griner doubling her was a focus and staying on other people.

We did not do a good enough job on Destiny Williams. I thought she got a couple of O boards on us. But defensively to me it wasn't the problem except for our fouling. And I just -- I don't know. I mean, it was different.

Q. Nneka mentioned that she was getting psyched out over the Griner mystique. Was that something you were concerned with at the beginning when you were game planning for this game?

COACH VANDERVEER: You know, I think that in some ways -- I think that we had really -- we watched block and block and block and block, but she didn't -- Nneka could get by her, Nneka's quickness. And probably waited a little too long but Nneka probably needed to attack her more earlier.

But I thought she did a good job in the second half of attacking, going at her a little bit better. But we needed -- I just felt like we needed other people besides Nneka. If 's going to guard Nneka, then other people have to take advantage of playing against either Williams or Pope, or come off a screen and knock down a shot, either Amber or Toni or Jos open for a 3.

I'm not faulting Nneka at all. I mean, if anything, maybe we should have said: You go at Griner and other people be ready to spot up and knock down some shots.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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