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An interview with:

**COACH VANDERVEER
CHINEY OGWUMIKE
MIKAELA RUEF**

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Stanford University Head Coach, Tara VanDerveer, student-athletes, Chiney Ogwumike and Mikaela Ruef. Coach, can we start with an opening statement from you?

COACH VANDERVEER: Well, if a game was like five minutes long, we would not be sitting up here and be in a good mood. If the game was even ten minutes long, we'd probably not be excited. But in 40 minutes our team, I thought, really showed great resilience, figured out things that were working, worked really hard together, and beat an excellent UNC team, and I want to congratulate Andrew and the North Carolina team on a great season. They just really are a young team, and they're going to be really good. But we're going to Nashville, and we're very excited about that.

I think our leadership with Chiney and Mikaela and for Mikaela to be knocking down her threes, that was absolutely huge. Her free throws, her defense was great. Chiney with a double-double, and not playing maybe as relaxed as she usually does, but a lot of different people helped us win. Bonnie had big shots, Lili had great defense and big shots, and Amber, I thought, really kept us in the first half.

Q. Chiney, why are you guys going to Nashville?

CHINEY OGWUMIKE: Heart, heart. People were making plays based on heart. It wasn't like the perfectly executed play. It was the

play you wanted to make because you played with your heart, and that was from the tip. Obviously, I struggled quite a bit. But Amber, whenever we need her, she steps up big. Mikaela, those shots were from her heart. She shoots a lot in the gym, but I mean, it was just a heart game. This is a fifth-year senior playing in Maples. I mean, it just came down to heart.

Q. Mikaela, Chiney kind of touched on it a bit, but where did that three ball come from?

MIKAELA RUEF: I'm trying really hard not to say something stupid. I told Chiney I'm going to say something stupid when I'm up here. You know what, I don't have a voice right now either, so that's always good. I used to be a three-point shooter back in the day, and then I came here and it wasn't my thing so much anymore.

But they were literally standing in the paint, and I was like, well, you know what? I'm either going to turn it over or this is going to go in, so I shot it, and it went in. Then I just kept shooting it. I was like, hey, why not, and it had to be three because that's the magic number.

CHINEY OGWUMIKE: That's her favorite number.

Q. Chiney, can you talk about the defense that you faced and how they draped on you like ornaments? Was it difficult to allow your teammates to do their thing to free it up for you or did you want to force it?

CHINEY OGWUMIKE: Absolutely not difficult at all. Yeah, we had a lot of people in double figures. Like they were just talking five. I think it was a very difficult game. For me, the physicality was a lot. They were sagging in a lot, and that changes the perspective. But I've talked about it, and talked about it, and talked about it, I have the utmost faith in my teammates. If I score zero points and we win, I'll be the happiest camper on the team. If we have so many people -- that's when we play at our best is when we have more

people in double figures. When Amber was doing it in the beginning and Mikaela consistently through the second half, and Lili coming up with big plays off the dribble, those are the things that make us a better team. So I say I like to be an afterthought sometimes, and I think tonight I had to be an afterthought a little bit, which was good because other people were being aggressive.

Q. Chiney, halftime, four points, things not going that well. What did your big sister say to you in the hallway?

CHINEY OGWUMIKE: She told me to relax. I've seen a lot of different defenses, and this one was different in the sense that it was an NCAA Tournament defense. It was will, and it was just banging in the paint. Like throwback basketball. She just told me to relax. And Coach Tara told me the exact same thing. That's why Nnemkadi and Coach Tara are soul sisters in a way. She told me to relax and play basketball. The game will come to you. She told me just be aggressive and push through. That's exactly what Mikaela told me, and exactly what my bench teammates were telling me. So I was just relaxing and I was like, okay, I'm going to be aggressive, and hopefully I'll finish a couple of shots. Hopefully, I can do that for my team.

It's not hard to finish when you have someone giving you dime pieces, and that's Mikaela Ruef and Amber Orrange and stuff like that.

Q. Chiney, you've been in a lot of big games. Why were you not relaxed tonight in the first half? What was the difference in the second half that was Mikaela's outside shooting and your other teammates, did that loosen things up inside for you?

CHINEY OGWUMIKE: Mentally, I thought I was relaxed. I feel like I was playing relaxed. It's just that things weren't coming the same way they usually were. It's sort of like you just have to step back and be like, okay, just keep playing the game. So I was relaxed, but it was just different. It was just different.

I honestly don't know how to answer that question. It's a 40-minute game. It's not going to go the way you want the first 20 minutes, but if you just keep pushing through, that's what good teams do. You keep pushing through.

Q. Mikaela and Chiney, the North Carolina players were in here and the



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coach, and they talked about how the game could have been even more physical. They wanted to make it physical, and they wished it had been even more physical. It looked pretty physical for me from the outside. Do you think you guys are underrated as a physical team? Do you think some of that is because of the whole Stanford business?

CHINEY OGWUMIKE: I don't think it's fair for the game to be more physical than it was today. I usually get physical games from a lot of people and so does Mikaela down low. It's different, so I think anymore physicality should have, would have, could have, it's like that. I don't think that's fair to the players, honestly, that kind of phrasing.

At Stanford, we pushed through that. It was physical, and we found a way to win. I mean, if that's what people want to do, we're going to just try to keep pushing through. That's what we did tonight and that's what we'll continue to do is pushing through.

MIKAELA RUEF: I think our team did a good job of not letting it bother us. It was a physical game. I thought the rule changes this year were to try to get it away from the physicality. But if it's going to be physical, our team can handle that. I think we did a decent job of it tonight.

Q. Mikaela, can you talk about what Lili did tonight? What Bonnie did tonight? There were some big plays by some various people tonight.

MIKAELA RUEF: Lili played amazing defense the entire night on Diamond DeShields. She had two back-to-back tough match-ups, and she's played like she's been here forever. She's only a freshman, but you know, we trust her and we expect her to play well because she's a great player and played some amazing defense today. And Bonnie is more than just a shooter. She had a nice pull-up today. I was like, nice Bonnie. And she was boxing out really well on the defensive end too.

I mean, these are things that these kids do it in practice. It's not like surprising and I'm just happy they were able to do it in the game too.

Q. You have talked about the heart being the difference in this game. How much was your experience edge a difference in this game?

MIKAELA RUEF: I thought before the

game that experience doesn't really mean anything. They kind of came out here and you could tell that they were playing super, super loose, and we were tight. Tara told us we were tight. I think the crowd could tell that we were tight. It doesn't matter how much experience you have, if you're playing tight, that's not good.

They came out and they played well. They shot well, and I don't think that has anything to do with experience. But at this time they're not freshmen anymore. They've been playing a whole year, so they're basically sophomores. Maybe we've been here a little longer, but I don't think really experience -- it was heart in this game, not experience.

CHINEY OGWUMIKE: Yeah, I'm on the same page. It was heart, not experience. I think that will be something that they'll learn from this experience because they're a very talented team. I think that also we've played a lot of games where we haven't necessarily played our best game, but we've pushed through coming from behind and not playing as well as we'd hoped. I think those experiences helped us stay steady and positive. You make a turnover, and you don't hang your head. It's great to have Mikaela say, Chiney, don't worry about that, or Lili say, Chiney, don't worry about that also. I think that experience helped us.

Q. When they went up 22-9 in the first half, still a lot of game left to be played but they simply weren't missing. I think Allisha Gray had three three-pointers in a row or something. Was there any sense of, uh-oh, these are freshmen, and they're not even thinking and they're just going to be able to keep this up? Or was there more of a sense that just take a deep breath and play your game, and it will all come back?

MIKAELA RUEF: I think it was probably the second. The entire time they just kept making shots, and I kept telling our team, it's all right. They're going to miss. They're going to miss. Keep playing hard. Make them make tougher shots. Get up there and contest their shots. And they're going to miss, and we're going to start making our shots. I think our team did a really good job of not being discouraged. Basketball is a game of runs. They had a run in the beginning of the game, and we got our run right before halftime to give us a chance in the second half. I don't think our team ever thought -- maybe we did panic, but nobody showed it. I think that's something that our team did really well.

Q. I don't want to make you guys cry, but this is the last time you'll play on this court. What is going through your minds right now?

CHINEY OGWUMIKE: Wow, I mean, if there is any way to win at Maples in front of your fans and family and everything, it's a win with heart. Honestly it's unreal what just happened. Just to push through when you're not necessarily playing well and you have people like Mikaela playing out of her mind because we're at home and there are so many people. She's come so far, and we've had so many people that just really wanted to keep this year going, and that started with everyone, not necessarily people who were out there, but like Erica Payne, Jasmine Camp preparing us. I guess that's like the only thing.

We have so much heart this team. Sometimes people say heart, you can't win only on heart, but tonight, I think we did.

MIKAELA RUEF: At the beginning of the year when the regional sites came out and I saw there was one at Stanford I was determined to play here, to win here, to go to the Final Four. This was our goal all year to win here and go to the Final Four. We have higher goals, but to be able to do it in front of our home crowd, in front of my grandparents who have been coming to games for five years.

My freshman year I would sit at the very end of the bench, and as Tara would say, hug the water cooler. They've been great supporters. My grandparents are the reason why I started playing basketball to begin with. To be able to play the regional championship, to go to the Final Four in front of them with them cheering is the most amazing feeling ever. In front of all of our fans, there is no greater feeling that I've had here in my entire time, and I just am so happy and words honestly can't describe it. Happy is not happy enough. It's more than that. I'm so --

CHINEY OGWUMIKE: Extremely elated.

MIKAELA RUEF: To make fun of Kayla, extremely elated.

THE MODERATOR: We'll now open it up for questions for Coach VanDerveer.

Q. Tara, was this the game of Mikaela's life?

COACH VANDERVEER: It was by far her best game ever putting on a Stanford uniform. You know, but Mikaela downplays how much work

she put into doing what she did tonight. You know, she's one of those early risers and she was in the gym getting her shot up. People have played soft on her because of Chiney's incredible ability, and she was ready for it. It was really exciting to see her play so well. For us to have five people in double figures, and Chiney struggled. I know Chiney had a double-double. But she really -- you know, you kind of asked about it, but when you come out, and she was a little bit like a circuit overloaded, which is what happened right here? She wasn't herself. She was missing defensive assignments. She was trying so hard. She might have said it wasn't panic, but it looked like it. Not just her, but she wanted to do it so badly for her team, her fans, all that she represents at Stanford so it's great that Mikaela could kind of be her Robin tonight.

Q. Tara, can you talk about the first ten minutes? You said it's good the game doesn't end there. But those first ten minutes you guys are hitting threes and you're in a bit of a hole, what were you thinking at that point?

COACH VANDERVEER: There were a couple plays where Amber went for a steal and the girls open with the three. They came out, and first of all, they're a very talented team and an athletic team. For us to only have 13 turnovers and them having 13 turnovers, that was a really good thing for us to take care of the ball. The game was plenty physical. Should people be allowed to hack and foul each other? I don't think so. I mean, we can do that too. But I think adjusting to the size, they're a very big team, and to figure out -- it took us a little while to say what should we be doing offensively to help our team get the shot that's we need? And I thought we got some great shots in the first half.

Bonnie had some wonderful looks, Lili was wide open. Mikaela, they're leaving people. They had three people on Chiney, and I told our team, we're not going anywhere without other people. This is not going to be -- this is other people's time to step up. They're giving us what we like. We like to shoot. Bonnie, that's what you were recruited for. Lili, this is a shooting game. This is up our alley. Let's go get our shots up, and we did such a good job in the second half shooting like 58%.

Q. Obviously, they thought by banging you and doing all that stuff was the way to beat you. Do you think you guys proved something tonight by overcoming that? You mentioned

you didn't think they'd be able to hack, is it an insult for them to try to do that? Give me your feeling about that.

COACH VANDERVEER: I think that you look at Chiney and what else can you do? You've got to body her. She gets that every single game. But other people, you have to draw -- she'll draw them in and other people have to draw them out. So the fact that Bonnie hit shots, Amber, I thought Amber kept us in the game in the first half offensively. Then defensively, we had some slip-ups, but once we got on track defensively, and I like it when we have the whole week to get ready, but we only had a day for people to learn a lot of stuff, and they learned it very well. You know, we opened it up for Chiney by hitting outside shots.

Q. Looking ahead, now six out of the last seven Final Fours, it's a remarkable record. But you haven't pushed through to win one. What is the best word in your mind to describe your feelings about all of that? Is it frustrated, angry? You haven't been able to do it, looking ahead, how do you see it?

COACH VANDERVEER: I am so excited for our team to be up here tonight and be happy. I'm so proud of how we battled. You know, we didn't go anywhere last year, and we had some kind of dips in the road this year that I think really have helped us be who we are.

We'll be ready. We're excited. We're looking forward to playing Connecticut. We're looking forward to going to Nashville. But tonight we're going to enjoy being a regional champion and representing the West. We have great basketball on the west coast.

Q. Was that the best defense you've seen from Chiney? And it was 24 minutes into the game before you got a pass to her on the low post. Were you thinking man, as a coach, I've got to find a way to get the ball down to her?

COACH VANDERVEER: When she had three people on her, I was like look, you guys, other people are going to have to knock down some shots. You know? It did take us a while to get her on the move, but as soon as we had some people open it up with some perimeter shots, and I think that was good for her.

You know, I think it was a good scheme. We've played against it a lot, and they made it a

really good scheme because they're so big and their whole team is so athletic. But I think that I personally thought that for us we could handle it. It just took us a while to get some traction.

Q. I'm sure in Nashville a lot of people are going to be expecting the final of Connecticut and Notre Dame. But I'm just wondering what you think or how you think your team is different than the first time you played Connecticut earlier this year?

COACH VANDERVEER: I think our team can -- the fact that we've played them already helps us. Everyone will understand this is what we need to do. They're a very big team. They're a very talented team. But our team will be very focused, and the fact that we've played them has played to our advantage.

If they just wanted a Connecticut-Notre Dame showdown, what did they make us do this for? If they wanted from the selection show just to have these two teams and show up in Nashville, then where's the excitement? I think everyone last year thought Baylor was going to win. Obviously, they didn't.

So we're excited. We're looking forward to it, and our coaches and team will work really hard to play better than we did last time at Connecticut in the opening game. I think we're much improved.

Q. Coach, when other teams are preparing for you guys, do you think that the opposing coach sits down and tells his team, hey, Chiney's going to make plays for 35 minutes? She's in great shape. She will make plays in the last couple minutes of the game, or does it sneak up on them in terms of just how consistent she is throughout the whole game?

COACH VANDERVEER: I think that Chiney's played against everything that she's going to see. She's played against doubles and triples and banging and fronting. She's a player. In some ways I think she'll be excited not to have three people hanging on her. But she's ready for anything that they throw at her.

Q. You play any country music?

COACH VANDERVEER: I'm going to listen to some country music. I'm going to be ready. I'm going to get some cowboy boots and be ready for it. I'm excited.

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