

October 16, 2007



An Interview With:

DEB PATTERSON

PETER IRWIN: At this time we'd like to welcome Coach Deb Patterson to the podium. Coach, welcome. If you'd like to make an opening comment we'll take questions after that.

DEB PATTERSON: We're very excited about the opening of the Big 12 season and feel as though we have a team that has a great opportunity to move up the Big 12 standings significantly this season. I'm excited about the newcomers we have in the program. I'm excited about the return of Marlies Gipson and feel that with Ashley Sweat we have a young lady that finished the season playing as well as any freshman in the Big 12, and we have Shalee Lehning, the premier point guard in the Big 12 and one of the best in the nation.

I think with that as a foundation we'll go into this great league with a great deal of anticipation and optimism and understanding that the top of this league with Texas A&M and Oklahoma, Texas in particular, is just, I think, is as good a top portion of the league as anyone will find in the country. And if you work your way down, 1 through 12, you'll find that we can compare and compete with any conference in this country, from top to bottom as we head into this season.

Q. Coach, can you talk about Marlies returning? And kind of a two-part question, but last year without her, how much different were you when she was with the team?

DEB PATTERSON: Well, Marlies was released August 18th, so she's got a good two months of working her way back into both the physical and mental aspects of competing well on the floor again. She looks great at this point in time, at the beginning of the practices that we've had. It's sort of something that at this stage, as you watch her practice, you feel is truly in history, so to speak, it's completely behind. I think it's

obvious, if you just look at record alone, 14 and 2, before Marlies went down, and the struggles we had during the course of conference play, finding the way to get a victory, the impact that losing her had on our basketball team. I don't think it was solely the loss of just the production she brings to the floor, I think it was just the change in dynamic of how we looked to play, getting the chemistry where we wanted it on the floor, night in and night out, taking a little bit of pressure off our perimeter players at the time, because we didn't have that great catch-and-pass shooter on Shana Wheeler, as Ashley Sweat as a freshman is learning to play in the post, so I think it was just sort of a ripple effect in a lot of aspects of our game.

But it was very exciting for us to see our team come together down the stretch at the WNIT tournament, once we finally did figure out what our roles were and our strengths. So I think we finished well, and I look forward to us starting with that same kind of energy and confidence.

Q. Would you be concerned or disappointed if your season ended at WNIT this year?

DEB PATTERSON: It's hard to say at this point. Obviously going into the season, I think every team in this league has the goal and aspiration of becoming an NCAA team. I don't think any of the players or coaches that compete in this team set a standard any lower than working to qualify for the NCAA tournament. But I think we also understand and respect the fact that this is a great league, it is a very challenging venture to qualify for an NCAA tournament bid in today's game. So I don't know that the word would be disappointment if we didn't make it. It's hard to say at this point. I think what we're more focused on is playing our very best basketball night in and night out. Certainly we aspire to be an NCAA tournament team. With those two games in front of us we'll go after it and see where it takes us.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about Ashley, the fact that she was a freshman and how well

she developed, particularly at the end of the season and what is she looking at right now?

DEB PATTERSON: Ashley made incredible progress through the course of the year. She went from a player that wasn't necessarily very mentally or physically strong, as she began early season practices and actually began early season competition to one that really embraced the challenges that big time basketball brings to the floor. She was thrown into the fire, so to speak, once we lost Marlies. She answered the challenge. She continued to get better. She worked hard every day in practice, particularly once we hit that late stretch of January and February. I thought that that was a real period of discovery for her.

Ashley figured out she could be physical, she could stand in there and take the heat and take the beating that sometimes low block players have to endure. Her versatility became something they grew in with respect to gaining a comfort level. We all know she can stretch defenses. She's got the ability to shoot the 3. Whereas she might prefer at times to play a finesse game, she was willing to play the power game for the basketball team. I think she evolved into someone that was very selfless, very dynamic in her versatility, and very strong minded down the stretch in the Big 12 play in a season where we weren't getting wins. And that's even tougher. It's tougher to go do something you're not comfortable with when you're not getting praise for winning basketball games, so to speak.

I really bring a great appreciation for the progress she made over the course of the season and I look forward to her building off of that.

Q. Could you talk a little bit about Shalee now as a junior, I know there was pressure for her as a freshman as a point guard? How has she progressed and how much more would you expect out of her as a junior?

DEB PATTERSON: I think Shalee Lehning's numbers speak for themselves after two years in the league. The numbers she's posted in Big 12 play and overall have been nothing short of phenomenal, in my opinion, for a young player competing on a very young team. And I look forward to having the opportunity to watch her play on a team like the one we'll bring to the floor this year that is a little more seasoned. Marlies, Shana, having significant basketball experiences under their belt, Kimberly Dietz is a senior on the

floor, Ashley Sweat, who has a confidence level about herself as she competes. I think from the get-go she established as a great leader, and performed in every environment at home and on the road, so I see nothing but even better days ahead for our basketball team because of what she brings to our league and for herself personally. I just will continue to say she's not just one of the best in the league, but I think one of the best in the country.

Q. How important was it to have the post element with Stanley and what do you look for from her this year?

DEB PATTERSON: Well, I think last year we learned how significant that depth in the post could be to a basketball team like ours, because of the struggles that we faced. Interestingly enough I think when we lost Marlies Gipson really where we felt the biggest impact was on the perimeter. It changed the game for them. It changed a lot of our assist numbers across the board. And so having some depth there, going into the season with Stanley who is willing to be physical, although she's very, very young, with Ashley Sweat, with Shana Wheeler and Marlies Gipson, I don't know that we had four post players that could take the floor and make a significant contribution over the course of their minutes, and so that's exciting for us to think about. I think, again, not just because of the production posts bring, but because of how it changes the game for your perimeters, it puts less pressure on making every open shot, which is something we struggled a great deal with on the perimeter. So for the way we like to play a lot of ball movement, a lot of in and out scoring, a lot of balance, having that depth in the post, if someone does get nicked or isn't having a particularly strong game is going to be something very special.

Q. If you were to read into why the coaches placed your team in the preseason poll, is it because of some of the questions that remain unanswered going into the season?

DEB PATTERSON: I think this is a great league, and when every coach sits and is beginning to formulate that ballot it is very, very tough to make a lot of distinctions between a lot of the programs in this league. I think certainly we all understand that Oklahoma and Texas A&M, with the talent that they're returning and the players that they've signed are really solid front runners, but

after that I think, as you head down the standings from 6th to 12th, it is legitimately anybody's best guess who is going to rise up, who is going to win games at home, who is going to sneak a few on the road. I don't know there's a great deal of distinction until the season plays out. So I feel as though when I look at the preseason picks, I can look at Colorado, I can look at Kansas State, I can look at Nebraska and Iowa State and your guess is as good as mine, where everyone will finish. And it's just that kind of a league. I think that's part of what makes us a great league. I think it's the same situation to Kansas, Kansas and Kansas State, tied for 11th and 12th place in the league last year, and so to think that you're now being picked 8th, that's a reasonable selection as far as I'm concerned and we'll toss it up and see where we finish.

Q. You mentioned about the post play, do you feel in some sense, I'm not saying that the last two years you didn't have that, but in some sense that could be a major difference maker for this team this season is the fact that you have Stanley, and obviously Ashley has a year under her belt and so forth that that in a lot of ways could maybe push you across the line a little bit more?

DEB PATTERSON: Well, I'm definitely thrilled about the fact that I feel we do have some quality depth in the post. And I think it has the potential to make a huge difference for our basketball team, for all of the reasons I previously stated. I think, again, one of the realities that I think we have lived with at Kansas State is the fact that because of lack of depth at times we've had to be pretty perfect on any given possession. We might not have had the rebounding presence we needed. We put a lot more pressure on our perimeter players to make every three ball that they put up there in order for us to have success. And good, solid post play makes the game significantly easier in every respect, defensively and offensively. So I'm very much looking forward to the impact our post will have.

I think when you have one of the nation's best pointguards it puts you in a position now where not just will assist numbers continue to rise beyond the high level that they're at, but I think you'll be able to see one of the best pointguards in the country recognized as such because we will win basketball games. And that will always be because we compete hard and well as a team and bring depth. But I think it's an exceptional -- just an

exceptional, optimistic attitude we're bringing to the floor this year because of the depth we do have in the post and because of the great perimeters we think we're bringing to compete.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you, Coach, and best of luck to you and the team this season.

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