

**October 16, 2007**



An Interview With:

## **SHERRI COALE**

PETER IRWIN: Coach Coale is from the University of Oklahoma.

SHERRI COALE: Thank you. Great to be back in Kansas City. I have fond memories of the last time we were here. We love the way that they raise college basketball, and look forward to competing here in spring.

**Q. Expectations always high in Oklahoma, your concentrations for 07 and 08?**

SHERRI COALE: My expectations are for us to be in the top three in the country in field goal defense and in assist ratio. You know we were 436th in assist ratio, but we're going to be better this career.

**Q. In the past couple of years we've seen Jody Conrad, Marsha Sharp. How do you think that's going to change the nature of the league, with the new coaches coming in and out, what the league is going to be like now?**

SHERRI COALE: I think it does change the landscape of our league. I think that we have been very fortunate, those of us who remain, to have worked under the mentorship and competed against such greats as Jody and Ceal and Marsha, and before that Marion. I think that with every coaching change there is a complex adjustment. When the Big 12 goes out and competes at the SEC or Big Ten and that style is created by the philosophies and the mindset and the personalities of the coaches in that league. I think there are a lot of adjustments, much like the lighting that's happening in this room (laughter). There will be changes. I think Texas will look different and play differently, because Gail is different from Jody. Just as I think Colorado has changed with Kathy McConnell. We all have a responsibility to make sure that we have the integrity and the class that

the Big 12 Conference is known for. That's what Jody and Marsha and Ceal taught us to be.

**Q. When you say Texas will look different, play different, how do you mean that, the difference between the coaches?**

SHERRI COALE: I think their personalities are different, their styles of play are different. A similarity will be their aggressive defense. I think that Duke was as aggressive as anybody in the country defensively and that's always what Texas was known for. But I think you'll just see a little bit of a change in the schematics. It's not only Gail and Jody being different personalities, but Gail coaching in a different part of the country and being exposed to different things. I think it will be a change, I think it always is.

**Q. Would you talk about the one or two ingredients that have to fall into the mix right for this team to reach its potential and what that might be?**

SHERRI COALE: We have to take better care of the basketball. I look back at last season and we beat Ole Miss by 15 if we controlled the basketball. They try to make you make mistakes with the ball, that's the way they play and the way they're successful, their defense generates offense. But clearly when we can get a shot at the basket we're going to have a chance to win games. I can remember a timeout in that game, where, if you just throw it towards the basket, because we're going to get the rebound, that would be a good thing. That's the deal. Really, we've got to take back the basketball. We were good defensively last year, I think we were third in the country in field goal defense. We guarded people. We didn't finish as much offense off the defense as we would like to, but we made people take tough shots.

**Q. Talk about replacing six seniors.**

SHERRI COALE: That's a tough one. I don't think that you do replace kids, any seniors when they graduate, but when you have a class the size of ours last year, the six kids, not only who

they were and the statistics that they left behind, but what they meant to our program. Some of them 5th years, both redshirt in their career. I don't know if you replace people. We'll get the three point shots, and yeah, but we have a freshman that we can get the shots that Erin did. We will take those charges, those attacks at the basket that Chelsi had. We will find a way to get that statistical output that we got from those guys on the floor.

What's difficult is the experience. What's difficult is the basketball IQ. That group of kids was as sharp on the basketball floor as anybody I've ever coached. That's a tough team to replace. Part of that is their ability to think and feel the game. And part of that is being in the program for four or five years. You just don't replace those two things immediately. We're working hard with the young people. I've been very, very impressed with our sophomore class with the growth they've shown from the freshman year to the early season thus far.

**Q. It's probably because of the numbers, but do you envision that this is the year where Courtney and Ashley are playing together, almost all the time or do you still want to rotate them in and out?**

SHERRI COALE: It's a little bit of a lot of different scenarios. Here's the deal, Courtney and Ashley together are fantastic. Ashley can find a way to get the ball to Courtney. She has a sixth sense about it and they have that communicative thing going between the two of them. The other thing is sometimes Ashley needs to play the low block, and sometimes Courtney needs to rest, and vice-versa. They'll be on the floor together a lot, but there will be occasions where one will be in and one won't, because we need each of them at full strength when they're on the floor. We have the freedom to do a lot of different things. But more so than last year, because Leah Rush is no longer with us, and she needed to be on the floor a lot.

**Q. What do you expect of her this year?**

SHERRI COALE: On a daily basis I ask her to do a little bit more, and sometimes a little differently. Courtney's talents run the gamut, and yet I can't tell you what an improved player she is right now, from who she was in the final game of the season last year against Ole Miss. I can't even quantify it. Maybe it's the USA Basketball

experience all summer. Maybe it's being with that national team this fall, and being on the floor with Diane Taurasi and Cappie Poindexter and on and on down the list. Maybe it's that exposure, traveling across the country, maybe it's growing up and finally being 20 years old. It could be a lot of things. But she's been a different kid. She's been more focused in practice, she's been a leader, and all of those things, in addition to tangible things, such as stepping out and shooting better from 10 or 12. She's worked on expanding her game. And I think that can go directly back to the USA experience, where she didn't get to be at the block quite as much. She's much more comfortable away from the basket. There are tangible and intangible ways she's grown. The bar keeps getting raised for her.

**Q. It looks like you're having a difficult scheduling test.**

SHERRI COALE: When you do your schedule you try to accomplish a couple of things, and for me, personally, the number one thing that I've always tried to accomplish with my schedule is to put my program at another level. Years ago we played Connecticut, we wanted to try to fill up our arena. We didn't think we could beat them at the time, we didn't have the personnel to be able to beat them. We weren't really worried about our RBI. And 10,700 people came to the game. And it started a love affair with our community with our team. When I put the schedule together, I'll be quite honest, I looked around the country and said every year Tennessee or Connecticut are playing in the Final Four. Every year those two teams have the toughest schedules in the country, one and two. So if I want to be one of them, I want there, too. Find the best teams in America and put them on the preconference schedule. Once we get to conference play it's terrific. But I have some control over what happens in November and December, and I want that to be just as terrific as well. We went after it. And whether or not this year's team is ready for that, I don't know. We'll know in about 23 more practices. But I like our chances.

**Q. Sherri, can you tell us about the travels this summer and how it has improved her as a player?**

SHERRI COALE: Her ability to step outside and be more comfortable away from the

basket. She understands the pace. I think she understood sitting on the bench. She didn't like it very much. And I think there was really a fire lit in the deepest part of her belly. She thought, hey, I really have a chance to be an Olympian, not just a part of USA Basketball. I'm not saying that that's something that's not important or not significant, because it is very difficult to make any of the teams, World Junior, Under 21, doesn't matter, what piece of the feeder system you've been involved in and she's been involved for years. But this is the Olympic team and I think she felt that when she went and trained with them. She thought I have within me the ability to make this squad and to participate in the 2008 Olympics. And it's a new hunger for her. Her work ethic, attention to detail, her mindset has been absolutely fantastic. All summer when she would come back and talk, and in the preseason when she returned from the Olympics, it's just been fabulous.

**Q. Can you talk a little bit about the type of system that she's been playing, is it going to be a little bit different from what you run, and are there differences. Also talk a little bit about you getting into the Big 12, is the team either mentally or physically going to be discovered with Courtney?**

SHERRI COALE: That's going to be the world's longest answer. No. A, does she get confused going back and forth from coach to coach, I think she's already got us confused because we look so much alike. She made a crack in practice the other day about -- now, what do we do when this happens, because with Coach Donovan we did this when something happens, and it was something bad that happens. And she looked at me and said, "I'm just teasing, I know exactly where I am." She will play that card a lot of times, "I was confused, I thought we were at USA -- no, I don't."

We were doing a scheme a little bit different than last year, and she said what am I going to do? I said take a deep breath and think about it, what do I want you to do? Score. Yes. Your role has not changed go right down there, there's a little block with your name on it, I want you to make a basket. It's not complex with Courtney. I think the exposure to different types of coaches, different types of environments, different types of teammates, different types of competition, do a lot of things for any kid that goes overseas, but particularly a kid as sharp and intuitive as Courtney is, she comes back and says I like this

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place I'm in. I have a good thing going here, and her appreciation level and the way she excels that are magnified.

**Q. Quick question about Amanda. Did we not get how much pain she was in at the end of last year?**

SHERRI COALE: No, nobody did. Nobody did. One of the toughest kids I've ever been around in my life. When Don McGinnis got into her shoulder, a couple of tears he assumed had probably been there for maybe even three years. She had torn that up in high school, early high school, and had figured out how to compensate and play through it. And it's just when she got to the University of Oklahoma and people start checking her out and you start figuring out those things, and she did tear it again in the season. But the great thing about this -- it's interesting, sports injuries tend to sometimes go in cycles. There have been so many athletes who have the labral tear in the shoulder, and the great news about it is it's a very, very high -- the surgery is a very high success rate surgery, almost always when you go in and you fix that you're fixed for good. You don't have any problems as a result of it. There is no chronic pain or immobility as a result of it. She's fortunate. I think back in the day, Keirsten Walters from Connecticut had it and it was one of those where nobody had heard much about it, it really never happened in women's basketball. There are several players, I think Tina Charles, that might be one of them that had it. But it's sort of the vogue injury, I guess right now, maybe due to more physical play. Amanda is a tough, tough kid. I watched on film this past weekend, I watched our Big 12 tournament in Oklahoma City and watched her play and watched her particularly, and the pain she was in was obvious and I think we maybe chose not to see it to get her through as long as she could. She's fit, she's probably lost 20 pounds, running well, and just looks like an elite level athlete.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you very much.  
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