

April 4, 2011



An interview with:



THE MODERATOR: Joining us on the dais is head coach Gary Blair and student-athletes Sydney Carter, Tyra White, Adaora Elonu, Danielle Adams and Sydney Colson. And this is an open interview forum so we'll start with questions.

Q. Coach, although any of the players might want to respond to this, I'd be interested. I think most players come out of high school thinking they know something about playing hard. Given the way you play, how much of a shock do you find that is to your incoming kids?

COACH BLAIR: Sometimes it's tough. Like when you see Colson and Carter, different styles from how they played in high school, Colson was just a flamboyant style of play, all offense. Strip you, steal, go the other way, passing lines, smile. Where Carter had to do a little bit of both, the defensive end. She had to play the 2 guard and the 1 in high school.

And it's just a little bit different high school setting for them. We have some very, very good high school coaches in Texas. And that's why so many other programs come into our state to recruit, whether it's football or basketball or baseball, I'm proud of what we have in our state.

And I don't like to share it, but we get our share of them and then we branch out to other players. But we go hard, because that's all part of practice.

Our practices are a lot harder than our games. A lot harder. The difference is, like last night, in both ball games, the starters were playing 95 percent of the minutes. On all four teams.

At this level you just learn how to go hard. You get it finished. You go watch the next ballgame, you go home. You see everybody in the lobby there. That took an hour before I could get to Steak n' Shake and you took 13 of us over there, my family members, and it was like a zoo.

And we were all sober drinking orange freezes and having steak burgers, and it was good. But right now we're all on adrenalin. You're not used to getting up this early because you all work the nights. But, hey, you're on adrenalin now, let's just have a great Final Four and enjoy the moment.

But while we're enjoying the moment, this team has got to seize the moment.

Q. The two Sydneys, before last night, what did you know about Notre Dame? And what do you know about them now?

SYDNEY CARTER: Well, I've seen them play a couple times on TV. And I just think they have really good chemistry on their offensive end. I think Skylar Diggins is a great point guard. And I think she does a really good job of running her team and finding the shots that she's used to taking in there. And I think she takes really good shots.

But I think they have a complete offensive team. And I just think they work really well together.

SYDNEY COLSON: Pretty much the same. I've seen them play a few times as well. Going into their UConn game, we were talking about how they have played them three times before.

And this is their fourth time playing them, and they could possibly get an upset just like us against Baylor. And we were confident that they were going to go out there and do it, just because, you know, so much is on the line. And at some point you've got to go out there and get a win

before it becomes embarrassing for your team.

And they went out and they battled hard. They're a physical team just like us, so I think it's going to be a really good matchup. Just like us, they have an all-around good team, and not just like one player who can potentially go off.

But like Syd said, Skylar does a good job for their team. She's a good point guard. And it will be -- at least we'll be used to guarding a left-hand point guard since we had to do it with Baylor four times this season. That may help us out a little bit because guarding a left-handed guard is unorthodox in our game. But they're a good all-around team.

Q. Sydney Carter, how do you balance the emotions and just the physical nature of last night a game, being totally exhausted, but also being totally excited about getting here, and just the thrill of victory last night, but then having to go right back knowing that you have to play again tomorrow?

SYDNEY CARTER: I was actually thinking about this question to myself this morning, because I was just thinking about how tired I was last night and everything like that.

But I gotta say to myself, I'm playing in the national championship game, so all this tired and I don't know if I can do it has got to go out the window.

I think once I get to the game my adrenaline will definitely kick back up. We've got to make sure we're staying focused and confident and making sure that our practice goes well today and our shootaround goes well tomorrow, because we're trying to reach our ultimate goal and that's to win the whole thing.

And we're one step away from it, and we're definitely not willing to shy down from it now. So everybody's just got to pull it together and do it one more time.

Q. Coach, could you share your insights on the matchups and the two team styles of play?

COACH BLAIR: I think it's, first, a great matchup. First, I think it's also good to see two new faces in the Final Four championship game. I think I know we screwed it up for ESPN, well, Notre Dame screwed it up by beating Tennessee. You don't have the Pat-Geno show and we screwed it up because now you don't have the Brittney Griner and the dunk possibility, and everybody wants to see the dunk.

But why not just have two pretty faces like me and Muffet there, and it's good for the game of basketball right now. Don't take anything away from what Pat and Geno and Tara has accomplished. But right now for our sport to grow, we need Texas A&M and Notre Dame in this game.

We need also the fans of Indiana. Whether or not they're Notre Dame fans or they're University of Indiana or Butler fans, we need them at this ballgame.

Okay. It will be embarrassing if we don't have a sell-out with a team from Indiana in the state of Indiana. We're getting as many Aggies up here as we can get. And we're converting a lot of others.

And we are trying to convert and we're working hard on that. The styles are similar. They're more physical with their half court defense. We do it with speed in fronting the posts and pressuring the ball.

They do it by old school ball. They know how to play. Their guards have always got their forearms out. Mallory and Novosel, is that how you say it, they're just smart. Now Skylar is similar to Colson. They're out there, they're flying around, and they're very similar to what they like to do. But the post players, I think size-wise we match up a little bit better than what we did against Stanford with the size. God, Stanford was just so huge.

What was happening, Danielle, we had to convince her to use her mid-range game instead of her low post game, because they were building a campfire around her there. So she had to get the shots there.

Notre Dame runs their stuff. And what's good about Notre Dame, it's a five-person team, not a one-person team, and all five people can score.

If somebody's not hot, they use her as a screener or defensive player, and that's the way this team is here.

So I think you're going to see balance. That's why you have all five starters up for both teams. They all deserve the questions from y'all. Because they've got the answers. They have the answers, their style, and one and two kids from the bench, that's all you'll see.

Okay. This kid's already gone 80 minutes, and she'll go another -- I think she's played just about every minute of almost every ballgame in the playoffs, and she'll go a little bit harder. And I want

that one down on the end to get 40 minutes out of her, too, without making this a little bit grayer. Okay?

But, you know, she made that behind-the-back pass. We've seen it before. We've seen it completed. And I about went bananas.

But I knew she would come back in and make the right read at the right time and the right play, and the pass was harder to make than the shot that Tyra White made. So give credit to the pass, instead of the shot. The shot was good because Tyra's the best kid we have at finishing on the driving layup.

Q. Coach, what you were talking about whether this is good for the game? Can you talk about the balance between name recognition teams and new faces, and is it time that the game can get beyond just maybe a name and a player that everyone will recognize, like UConn and Maya Moore?

COACH BLAIR: Maya Moore has done so much to this game, just like Geno has done for the game and everything. And how can you not love what Maya Moore brings. And all of you out there are all disappointed that Maya's not in the finals. I know it, unless you're from Notre Dame or whatever, because she's such a beautiful person and a beautiful player.

I read the *U.S.A. Today* this morning, and Christine did a great article on Stanford and four years they've gone through. But that story was supposed to be the winning story, but all of a sudden that was her -- I guarantee you that was her story before the game even started.

And so y'all have story lines to do whatever your editors or your Lou Grant tells you to look for, but the 40 minutes of basketball, why does it have to be decided on who the best player is or who is most well-known coach is?

Now, look in your other sports. Look in the Tampa Bays that cannot even sell out in baseball, but, my gosh, they've had great teams.

Look at my Texas Rangers now, just swept the Red Sox three games in a row. It's good for sports. It's good for story lines. Instead of having Brittney Griner or Maya Moore and Geno, but what's wrong with good old Muffet and Gary and who teams that play tremendous team basketball that do not rely on just one player?

Q. Both Sydneys, after the second game last night, Connecticut coach Geno



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Auriemma said that Notre Dame was impossible to play defense against. I'm sure his comment was made after the loss and everything. But that sounds like it sets up perfectly for you guys considering your last two games have been kind of mission impossibles. Is that the challenge of playing a team that's on a roll like you guys? Is that something that kind of excites you at this time in addition to playing for the national championship?

SYDNEY CARTER: Definitely. I think that, you know, a lot of people -- I don't want to say they fear our defense, but I think they really respect what we do on the defensive end. And we take so much pride on the defensive end and making people feel uncomfortable and making them do things that they don't want to do.

So I definitely think that worries them a little bit. And I just think we're going to come out with the same defensive intensity that we always come out with. And that's been so successful for us. So I don't see why we would do anything different.

And I just hope that we have that adrenaline rushing in us in this upcoming game and we play harder than we normally play.

SYDNEY COLSON: Basically the same thing Syd said. Just we're going to have to come out and keep the same, you know, defensive tenacity that we've had all throughout the tournament.

The Stanford game was the first time where we were having to come from behind. Every other game we had jumped on people from the beginning of the game and played good defense, maintained our lead, and held our composure throughout the whole game. It can't be anything different when we're playing for the national championship.

We have to go out and Coach Schaefer was telling us, we've gotten to this point by doing what we've done, and it's worked for us. Don't change anything that we've done thus far, because this is what's gotten us into this good situation.

So we'll have to come out, stay aggressive on defense. It's going to be a physical game, I think they're just as physical as we are. And I think it's just going to be an all-out battle, which it should be.

Q. Coach, you might have believed

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since the beginning of the season you guys could be in a national championship, but did you ever think it was going to be against Notre Dame and did you think that anybody ever thought that the women's national championship would be Notre Dame against Texas A&M?

COACH BLAIR: Like I said, ESPN didn't envision it. But the thing is we're both No. 2 seeds. We're both in the top ten all year. So what's the big story? I mean, we've both done what we were supposed to do all year long. So give credit.

And what's the story in the men? No No. 1 seeds are there. And we played well, we've done balanced scoring. Nneka had 30-something last night and Maya had 30-something. They're both going home. Both these teams have balanced scoring, even though we have an All-American there but she'll defer to others when they take her away and they were putting so much attention on her and we had other kids step up. This kid's 5'6". The other one's 5'8". Look at the guard.

I think the story today is two teams that do what they do well and they don't worry about having the 35-point scorers and the great names of the game, the story is Notre Dame and A&M. And if you all cannot remember some of our names, that's good. But remember A&M and Notre Dame. Not Muffet and Gary. A&M, Notre Dame. It's good.

And if we can pull this thing off, it would be a great football rivalry we need to get going. We just beat Notre Dame in tennis, I noticed the other day. Okay. But we did win that game 4-0.

THE MODERATOR: We'll dismiss the student-athletes.

Q. Coach, I know that the crowd numbers were disappointing, and I know empty seats are disappointing. Could you comment big picture on what you thought of the venue, the site. There's been a lot of discussion ongoing about arenas versus domes for this event and whether growing the sport needs the most seats possible versus a packed, full arena, which obviously wasn't filled last night.

COACH BLAIR: I'm not really sure how they're going to spin why the arena -- they're blaming it on the four teams that were here. We get 800 seats, and you have to turn around charters and tickets and everything to get them here this short of a time.

Notre Dame's the only local team. And I'm not sure how many tickets they've sold. But it sounded like a lot more than Connecticut up in the stands last night.

And people like to pull for the so-called underdog. All the coaches that are in the stands, the ones that didn't sell their tickets and come to the game. We have our convention going on.

And I'm all for the arenas. But I'm all for me being in whatever venue it is. And if we can go back to where the Hoosiers played in their little gym, whatever, and I like the arenas. I like to see it in American Airlines Center in Dallas. I think that's a great venue right there.

San Antonio was great. Do we keep going into areas just to justify the reason? I'm very interested to see what's going to happen in Denver next year. That scares me right there. So I'm hoping -- we've never been there before. It's not a huge basketball state. And all of a sudden we're going to Denver just because it's a name right now. I'm not sure that's going to work.

Believe it or not, when we went to Tampa Bay, there was great crowds there, in Tampa Bay, which was more of a baseball state or football state.

And we have to make sure, not who has the best bid, but what is good for the game to grow, where we should go. When we were here at the dome in 2005, I think we averaged about 24,000 fans or something like that. But it didn't feel good for the coaches or the players.

Okay? I set up and watched both games and when Baylor won, and how many of you all in the audience right now, raise your hand, can tell me who lost that game? Okay? There's a few.

They only remember the winners. Okay. I want to make sure you're going to remember Texas A&M. And the only way you're going to remember Texas A&M is who wins this thing.

Okay. Who wins this thing. And we fought hard to get here. And I want to make sure it's not just a feel-good story and it's a pat on the back or atta boy thing when we get back to College Station. I want the whole nine yards.

And we're going to work hard today in practice to get us to where we need to. We've got to be smart in practice, because we gave a lot of energy last night.

So it will not be your normal slam-bam practice. We have to do more of a mental practice today than a physical practice.

Q. Coach, you're saying how it's good for the game to have the two new teams here and the new faces. Do you think the game's ready to have that situation? Is women's basketball ready to have you in the national championship tomorrow night or is it still at the point where it needs a Maya Moore or Brittney Griner or a Pat or Geno?

COACH BLAIR: I think it's needed if you all will write that story. I think you all have got your choice of how you want to spin it, and it's going to be up to you.

Can a good women's basketball game that's going to be played between the ears and below the rim excite the people out there enough to watch this thing. And that's what it's all about.

You look at the NBA, all the chosen stars are all going to the major cities to play. And right now we're starting to spread it out a little bit more in women's basketball instead of everyone going to Tennessee, Duke and Connecticut, Stanford and a couple other schools.

We're starting to spread it out. Look at the Baysors, and look at the Texas A&Ms. They're getting it done. And look at the Notre Dames, and look at the schools that are moving up that you've never heard before, the Gonzagas. It's good for our game.

It might not be good for your ratings or your newspaper lines but it's good for the game. And so sometimes you have to go through the growing pains of this to get to where we want to be, parity, where people would be excited where a Butler and a VCU are playing for the national championship on the men's side. We need that on the women's side as well, as long as it involves A&M and somebody else.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about -- I saw where earlier this week you talked about taking the job after they showed commitment to you. Can you talk about where the Texas A&M program has come from and what's changed in that program since you started back in 1982?

COACH BLAIR: In '82 when I was at Louisiana Tech, we just won it in the last year, in '81, out in Oregon. Last year of AIW.

And really that was NCAA, too, as well. It was just -- we just had to wait for another year. The big programs of that time were Tennessee, ourselves, Old Dominions and the USCs of the world and throw in a couple more that I'm missing right now. The legend of the games on the front

row here, you can ask him about that, with Mel Greenberg. But the talent was good at the top, but it was so average in the middle and it was very poor at the bottom.

And now we've grown where our average, the middle is pretty good. Look at the attendance. I looked it up last night. Notre Dame has played in 23 games of over 7500 fans. 23 ball games that they've played already. That's good for the game.

Now we've got to get the middle of the pack to start drawing a little bit better because they don't have the name stars. So they've got to be more creative. Sort of like what Minor League baseball is doing now. Minor League baseball is fan friendly and they're putting butts in the seats.

We need to do that and be more creative in marketing our sport. We need to spend money to make money, and a lot of programs do not do that. They will not put enough money into women's basketball.

Women's basketball grows in so many ways besides the dollar Bill. The revenue. Every Aggie across the world has seen us in the top 25. Now in the AP poll or *USA Today* poll for about six years. That helps the chemistry. That helps the admission department.

That helps Aggies all over the country feel good about themselves, the same thing is happening in Notre Dame and the little Gonzagas.

That's where we are right now. And hopefully we can keep it going. But men's basketball, what did they say? 48 million here in this town when they had the Final Four here, and they'll make 17 to 20 million here for the women's side. That's where we have to go. So we're still getting a larger chunk than some of the other sports.

Q. Stepping outside a little bit to the bigger picture, there's some serious money being committed to coaches' salaries at this level now and long-term contracts. Could you speak to maybe what the market forces are that have led to these contracts and do these contracts kind of validate now the women's game within the bigger picture of an athletic department?

COACH BLAIR: I think it's true, because you cannot measure it on dollars and cents. We raised 24 million in nine months to put in our new practice facility when Gillespie and I first got it going at A&M. It wasn't just all Gillespie. It was

women fans that wanted to donate because of women's basketball. It wasn't just all from the men's side.

The salaries, are they justified? You betcha they are. Just like the first time all you writers back there, when Skip Bayless got his first paycheck and you all were jealous way back. He's good. If you're good, pay the person. Okay? Pay the person.

They need to pay you guys a whole lot more, that's why my journalism minor at Texas Tech, I decided to coach, because I knew what they were paying y'all.

And I want everybody to feel good about their sport. Does a CEO deserve 65 million, probably not, but he's still responsible for that company of going to the next level. And if he's earned it, go ahead.

We just hired Nikki Caldwell down at LSU. That's a great hire down there. Kevin McGuff going from Xavier to Washington. Very much needed, very deserving. I think it's good. We're not even close to comparison to what's happening on the men's side. But we're still earning our right.

Look at the coaches that have been up here at the top. We're finally getting decent paychecks. And it's fun. And I have to have some of those paychecks myself as well, because I've got 13 relatives here and they're all on my ticket. So I've got to keep winning.

Q. Do you think it's fair that women are held to a higher EPR standard than the men, or perhaps that maybe is a good thing?

COACH BLAIR: The higher what?

Q. EPR.

COACH BLAIR: Yes. Yes and no. You can go either way on that. That's a Catch-22 thing. There's not a right answer for that. I just think women, coaches or women administrators, I think they're very good, and I think that's why you're seeing women in this world continue to grow. I think it's good for our country.

I think some day we're going to see a woman president, very quick, or a woman vice president. And it's needed. I'm all for it. I'm part of the minority. I'm in the women's sport even though I'm a man coaching, but I'm in the minority part of our sport. But I'm proud to be in it. I chose women's basketball. Women's basketball did not choose me.

I chose it in high school when the girls came over next door to the boys' gym and asked

me if I would take the job while I was waiting around for a baseball job. I chose it and I've never gone back, and all the way from when I left making 22,000 in high school to taking Louisiana Tech at 22,000, in 1980.

And then it's been good since. Andy, I don't know if I answered that one. I probably butchered that one. But if we want to talk about it a little bit later, but I appreciate your coverage, what you're doing.

Q. You mentioned the other day that obviously Texas A&M is known as the football school, and now of course you have two schools playing for the national title that have predominantly known as football schools. Can you just, from your end of it, from the years that you've been there, talk about specifically the difficulties in getting people to pay attention to something else in a place where football is like religion?

COACH BLAIR: You know, it's sort of funny, spring football is going on at the same time. Our baseball team is very, very good. They just changed the start of the baseball game on Tuesday night to 5:00 because we were going to be on TV at 7:00. Could you picture that happening?

I mean, I'm all for the Digger Phelps and Shelby Metcalfs. And some of you might not remember Shelby, but he was the men's coach for so long at A&M. And it's good to see those schools be recognized for something besides football. We're not going to put 80 something thousand in like we do for every football game, and Notre Dame, that's one of my bucket list things also, I've always wanted to see a Notre Dame football game in person.

But eventually I'll get there. But the question is, are these schools -- Stanford, Ohio State, the Tennessees, the Floridas of the world, the Texas of the world, have all been the complete package over the years. They've been good in every sport.

Texas A&M finished sixth in the Sears Cup last year. We're doggone good in a lot of sports and it all starts from Bill Byrne. He's our athletic director. I'm his first hire. He came in '03. I came in '03. And he said we're going to have a total program while we're building football back to the level. So instead of putting all our resources into one sport, we put them into all sports and use the

tradition of A&M to build up everything else that we had.

That's what separates A&M from so many other schools is the traditions that we have. It's not the military as much of the core, it is just we support -- we support women's sports as well as we do men's sport. Our attendance in national softball, soccer, I think we're number two in attendance in soccer. Softball we're in the top 10. Basketball we finished No. 12 behind Notre Dame.

But we used to be dead last when I took the job. We were averaging about 300 people a game, and those are usually family members.

And that was it. When I took the job there, we were 12th, out of 12 teams. And probably 13th, we were probably behind the conference office at that time.

But it's what we are. It's what we are, and we share. The e-mails I'm getting from the other coaches, that means more to me than the e-mails that I'm getting from the fans, because some day it's going to happen to each of those coaches at A&M.

They're going to get their chance at this level. But now you've got to figure a way to make it go.

I'd like to see what the Rose Garden looks like. I'd like to see what Disney World looks like. Okay. All those things are very important. But they go to the winners, not the teams that finish in second.

Q. You said spring football is going on now. Is playing for the national championship tomorrow night, would this be a bigger story than the ongoing spring football?

COACH BLAIR: Not on the hits -- Homer can probably tell you that. The hits that go on in spring football and recruiting versus a men's basketball story or equestrian or women's basketball, it's mindboggling. Right now football is the number one sport in the country as far as that.

But the best story might be basketball, because of the entertainment value that we're presenting to people. It's for everyone. People sit down, but let football do its thing while the rest of us are continuing to grow.

How many of you have ever covered a soccer game? How many in this room can tell me what an off-side trap is in soccer? Not too many of you. But we're growing. Remember when y'all used to make fun of soccer and everything?

Now we're putting great crowds. It's going to continue to grow, and so is women's basketball.

Football is still out there. I love it. I never miss a game. Never miss a game.

I'm the biggest Dallas Cowboy fan in the whole world. Can tell you all the history, the whole nine yards. But there's time for other sports. But now the seasons are so long, now we're overlapping.

When we overlap that's generally when I go on the road to play road games in November, December, because I do not want to be there when football's still going on. I'll usually play one game a week but I do not bring in a lot of buy-in teams because we will not draw well. I'd rather go on the road, get the RPI points, make my team better by playing in the situations and the venues we have to go to.

Q. A few years ago you remember, of course, when Baylor and Michigan State played. Purdue and Notre Dame had been national champs and some of us were trying to see maybe if there was more equalizing going on in the women's game and more schools we would expect to see winning the national title. Of course, as you know, there was a run for UConn and Tennessee. They kind of came back to the top, bubbled back to the surface in a big way. Is this maybe the time now with what's happened over the last two weeks where women's basketball is really seeing the true parity that many have thought might exist almost 40 years after Title 9?

COACH BLAIR: I think that happens when you see a Skylar Diggins stay home and go to Notre Dame instead of going to the Connecticut which probably finished second on that or Tennessee. They're either always second, third, or first. They're never last.

I think it's also very good for the game. And to see the Courtney Vanderoost stay on the West Coast and play at Gonzaga. Right now, why not have these stars -- we all want to win championships, but sometimes the conference championship is large because we're here for four years.

We do not have the one-and-out kids. The one-and-out kids, that's not good for the game of men's basketball. Men's basketball, gosh, that's a great game.

And look at the money that it generates everywhere. But I wish they'd change that rule in the men where they could not leave after one year.

At least two. Three would be mindboggling, but that's not going to happen, because of the egos and the money that's involved.

But in the women's game, isn't it great that Brittney Griner is going to be here for the next two years? But isn't it also great that little 5'6" Sydney Carter is going to be here for another year, and y'all are going to be doing research and saying: What's Sydney all about? Where did she come from? DeSoto High School, same high school as Von Miller who will be drafted hopefully by my Cowboys in the first round.

But that's what we need now. We need some of these little stories instead of the sensationalism stories. You remember back in the early '80s, South Carolina ended up beating my old school Stephen F. Austin to get to the Final Four and all you heard about was Pam Parsons and the stories afterwards because that's all Sports Illustrated wanted and you writers wanted. You wanted the dunk. You wanted to lower the rim.

You wanted everything different than the story of the game itself. It's pure. It's pure. It's good. It is true. We're not getting paid under the table. We're not doing all this stuff that is going on now in the men's game. We're not having to do that. And hopefully, if it ever happens, I'm sure the hell out of it, retired on the golf course, because I want no part of it.

We police ourselves very well with the coaches and this association. There's no major scandals in women's basketball and hopefully we can keep it that way.

I don't know if I've answered your question, but I am a big fan of yours.

Q. Yesterday you were talking about how you were able to chop down Stanford's trees that you had to go up against. Tomorrow night you face a very talented Notre Dame back court. Talk to me about how you're going to prepare your team and your game plan for that.

COACH BLAIR: They don't make a lot of mistakes. You're looking at teams shooting 48 percent. They're shooting it in the playoffs as well as they shot it during the season. So they haven't changed whatsoever. Everything is the same.

You go across their stat sheets all year long, they've just been consistent. Two years ago we were at Notre Dame to play in the first and second round. We beat somebody, Evansville I believe in the first round, first time ever, and we were supposed to play Notre Dame.

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Notre Dame got upset by Minnesota. But you could see Notre Dame was going to get better and better and better. And now look at what they're proving. They do not get down by losing in a round, they get better by coaching their kids up.

And that's what we have to do, because Muffet hasn't had a whole lot of Skylars. Okay? I've got one coming in next year, Kelsey Bone, number two ranked kid in the country. She went to South Carolina, I got her on the rebound, a Houston kid.

I haven't been getting kids like that. I've been getting the junior college Danielle Adams or the Tanisha Smiths or the kids we've coached up.

Tyra White was the only McDonald's All-American sitting up here. The only one out of the five up here. And I imagine Skylar's the only one on Notre Dame.

And we coach kids up. That's the strength of what we have. My coaching staff is damn good. Okay? My luck, who was it, Carol Owens, today, if you hadn't written in this story, she ruptured her Achilles in practice. She was a great player at Notre Dame, the whole nine yards.

I promise you, I will not rupture my Achilles because I quit doing drills about seven, eight years ago. But those are good stories.

We want to sell what we have right now. It is going to be a game, a pure game. Remember -- no, you're too young. You remember back when Connecticut got to the Final Four for the first time in New Orleans? Nobody knows who the hell they were.

You couldn't tell me the five starters, okay, because they were not household names. But the media is not as good as what it is now. Now people are going to know who my two Sydneys are, because these two Sydneys take the basketball away from them. They're going to make it in life.

Whatever they decide to go into, and hopefully they do not go into coaching -- I don't think either one of them -- because they're going to make it as top women CEOs somewhere in the country. It's going to be very special.

And, by the way, that was a good article in the *Indianapolis Star* yesterday on the Stephanie White and the four other young ladies that they interviewed what are they doing now, some are in marketing, some are in anything that has to do with basketball or sport. And it was good because I read those stories to my kids. I've read those

stories and say there is life after basketball and you do not have to be a pro basketball player to do it.

I'm sorry I'm long-winded, but, folks, this is my moment, and I'm going to seize it.

Q. This is a national media stage. What do you think the misconceptions are about Texas A&M as a university and as an athletic program?

COACH BLAIR: I think we need to do a better job of marketing Texas A&M as a whole instead of marketing just one sport or one band or even the secretary of defense in Bob Gates. We need to realize what we are.

It's marketing. Exposure. It's getting people out there to sell it, because I'm tired of going in to airports and seeing all Texas and Michigan and UCLA and even Miami stuff over Texas A&M. If we've got 50,000 students we need to find a way to sell Texas A&M as a whole a lot better instead of whatever sport is in season.

That's something I've been on my soapbox for a long time on that. And everybody says yes, yes, but we've got no direction on how to solve that. And I think Texas A&M is a school that everybody loves. It's sort of like an Army-Navy football game; everybody loves that game because of the spirit and the tradition and red, white and blue.

But let's enjoy A&M for what it is. It is an all-purpose university that is tremendous in education. It is tremendous in all the sports that we're doing. We're in the top 10 in 10 out of our 20 sports right now. Let's give credit to what is done. Let's give credit to our leaders, from our president on down to our AD, to all the support staff that works with us.

Now, I want to sell A&M. I do not want to have to explain A&M to a person from Connecticut or a person from Gonzaga. I want to be able -- that they're going to know who we are and what we've accomplished.

And a lot of that has to do with the media, but a lot of that has to do with us and marketing.

Q. Given what you and Notre Dame saw night after night January, February, as opposed to some of the other big names in their conferences this year, how important is it and what kind of exercise really to get you over this level?

COACH BLAIR: Well, remember back in the days when we were at Louisiana Tech, we

didn't even have a conference. We would just go play four games on the West Coast in a week, day off between every one. We'd play Long Beach, USC, UCLA, Vegas. One week time, get back to class. Then we'd go to the East Coast and we would play Georgia, Clemson, Maryland and Old Dominion, one other school in there. Could you picture schools doing that now?

We did it to save money, but then we also did it to find the competition. Now we find it -- we're going to a 10-team conference. We're losing two teams that were near the bottom this year in Colorado and Nebraska.

So we've been getting seven to eight teams into the same as the Big East. Is that nine, is that right? In the women?

Is that good for the game? We do not have a bottom in our conference. Okay? How can you say Nebraska is at the bottom when they were 31-0 last year until we beat them in the semifinals? That's what makes us stronger, is the parity, the coaching, within the Big 12 is very good.

Nobody leaves the Big 12, Mel, unless they're asked to leave. Nobody. The other conferences come to us.

Not just because of the pay, because of the attendance and because of the recruiting base that we have in that Midwest corridor right there, particularly in the southwest corridor that we can get kids to come. Basketball is very important to the ten schools that are left. But we're going to have to play 18 games next year.

That's like the NFL. They have to play 18 games. That's stupid. But we're going to play it and have a conference tournament.

Now, will we have enough gas left once we get to the playoffs to be able to continue to play at the level that we're playing right now? Because I cannot see the teams that finish 9 and 10 in our league are going to hold us back. They're going to make us better. But it is going to drive us bananas because right now January and February it's the 60 longest days that you can ever -- and the 60 shortest nights as a coach, and it is tough.

And it's a grind, grind, grind. Maybe that's why I'm doing a commuter marriage right now because my wife probably doesn't want to be with me during those two months right there, because it's all preparation, it's all recruiting. It is all game planning, and it's dealing with 18- to 22-year-olds and the problems that they have in life.

And believe me, they have a few



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problems. But we adjust. But us 65-year-olds have a few problems, too, okay. But the most important thing I do, Mel, to get myself ready, I go to a movie the night before I play or the night after I play, and I've been sneaking in on that from 58 years old on on that senior discount, and I go in and get a box of popcorn. I sit by myself over in the handicap and I lose it for two hours.

I lose it and get into fantasy world and watch a Julia Roberts or Tom Cruise or something.

And that's the only way I can get through it. Other than that, because there's so much parity right now, there used to be a bottom of the league. And when I was in the SEC, the SEC was at the top.

Now it is the Big 12 and probably the Big East at the top. And I can't see that changing.

Q. Could you talk a little bit about the job your support staff, your managers, trainers, all them have done during the season and especially in the tournament?

COACH BLAIR: Sometimes those are some of the best stories that nobody ever asked them. I'm glad you asked that question. I've got one young lady, walk-on who is on scholarship this semester, that owes \$64,000 in student loans.

Okay? That's Catherine Snow, but she wanted to be an Aggie instead of going and playing Division II or junior college ball where her ability lied. So she didn't have the rich parents. She had the grades. She's getting there. She's a great story.

I've got five managers that -- all five of my managers this year are all female. They're all excellent kids. They don't come out there to be so-called men's practice players that serve as managers like some schools cheat on.

I've got a separate men's basketball practice squad that comes in along with Kelsey Bone, who is sitting out this year. All those kids, the student trainer, I love her to death. I can't even tell you her full name, but she gives me a smile every morning.

Those kids, my director of basketball ops, Eric Burts, he's got to handle all of this stuff. He has to handle the money, the logistics, where we're going, whatever. The Steve Millers, Charlotte Millers and video coordinators, assistant AD, they have to handle all the little stuff to keep me atune. Miller tells me every morning: You're going to be here, be here, you gotta spin that, don't talk too long on that, talk about A&M as a whole.

I feel like I'm Obama and I've got to have the research to be able to say the right words sometimes to y'all. And that's what -- last night, it was funny. I was walking across. Condoleezza Rice was sitting there in her Stanford thing. And I shake hands with Tara VanDerveer, and I point towards her, giving her a little salute, being an ex-Marine, and I said: We've got the Secretary of Defense in Bob Gates. I told Tara. And Bob Gates' wife was at our game. Bob doesn't get into sports as much as his wife. His wife, Becky, is our number one fan, and she flew in from Washington just to see the ballgame.

So it's all the little stories that you see in the women's side that's so important. But all that support staff, they work so hard. Look at what -- a lot of times, like when I was at Arkansas, when we would get beat in the second round, they'd come into the press conference and wanted to see if our band or our cheerleaders could advance, or our mascot, because we would win that -- we're winning it here.

Our Yell Leader won the mascot competition. I hate to call our Yell Leader a mascot, but that's all we have. Don't have a mascot. We have Reveille who doesn't travel in basketball. But we want to win that. We want to win everything we possibly can.

Q. You were talking before about the difference between -- you were saying before basically there's no No. 1 season on the men's side. Is there a difference in terms of perception you think that when there's no Tennessees or UConns in the women's side in terms of an upset is a bad thing in women's basketball?

COACH BLAIR: I don't think it's a bad thing. I don't think that either game was upsets last night. When the 2 beats a 1, come on now, those weren't upsets.

I think Notre Dame is playing so well down the stretch right now. I mean, she's had to go through, Sheri Coale, Pat Summitt and Geno Auriemma. That says a lot for Notre Dame.

I've only gone through Vivian Stringer, Andy Landers, Kim Mulkey, who am I missing now? Tara VanDerveer. I mean, those are our heros.

If I was collecting baseball cards right now, which I used to, I would have those cards. And so that gives you a high right there competing against

people of that caliber at this level.

That is very important to me and still growing myself as a coach, learning from them, getting back to the film and seeing the mistakes that I made as a coach or my point guard and how can I relate those to those kids where we can make a one-day turnaround preparation time.

We've got to be able to do it. Now it becomes mental. After we get finished with all you guys and gals, we've got to go and forget our fans. The best thing they do now, they put a policeman up on the floor where your team stays now, to keep all the relatives away and the fans.

We've come a long way. Okay. But you have to have that. We eat breakfast down at the basement there to just be away from our fans.

You want to love them. You want to hug them. You appreciate the money that they spent, but it's time for rest and focus right now.

Q. How much of a breakthrough is this for your program? And also curious, what was the last movie you got to see?

COACH BLAIR: Last movie? Last movie. Hold on. I didn't like Jennifer Aniston's last movie. I didn't think it was up to her caliber. Oh, gosh. The best one is what I flub up. "Kings Speech." Absolutely the best movie I've seen in a couple of years, and the greatest acting job.

And it makes you feel as a coach sometimes, when I could get up here and butcher the English language, that a king can get up there and go through the troubles that he had to get to the point where he would feel comfortable addressing the media.

Okay. Now that to me I could sit back and I could watch that and then I could think of myself in those situations, where I see somebody like a Bill Clinton or Obama or any of the politicians that were so good. They can just talk off the cuff. And I admire people that can do that.

I grew up in the Paul Harvey days where he was a great reader. But somebody had to write it out for him. But then I love to see people that have that great command of the English language right now.

And if I could go back to school at Texas Tech and I studied under two University of Missouri professors that told me every day that Missouri was better than Texas Tech, even though they taught at Texas Tech -- haven't figured that out yet -- but I want to learn -- and it's not too late at my age to sit there and learn how to have better communication skills, be able to walk into a room

like a Pat Summitt and can hold a room and make everybody in that room feel just as important, whether you're a student newspaper reporter or a junior high coach, to a college coach, to a big CEO.

She has that ability. So I learn from my peers. I watch you guys. I read your stories. Some of them are great. And you're never given enough credit for what you write. The printed word is just so important out there.

I do not use a computer. I have learned how to use whatever you call it on my hip there. I've got an iPhone now. I've gone up. Two months ago I got an iPhone. I just learned how to text about two months ago.

After the game, I had 193 messages. I hadn't cleared them all because it takes me too long. I have to go one finger and do all that. I'm still learning. This is a breakthrough for Gary Blair or Texas A&M right now. Gary Blair's been here before. I just haven't won it all, except -- it's a breakthrough for Texas A&M and the Big 12 conference.

Last year Oklahoma and Baylor both got to the Final Four and neither one of them won the conference tournament or the conference championship. Nebraska and A&M won those two. So it shows you how strong our league is, and that's very important to me is to give credit to our other coaches in our league, because they're very good.

As soon as I got to the room, Debbie at Kansas State sent us a big flower arrangement and everything like that. Those are coaches that even though we compete so hard against each other, we know how to say, hey, good job. Job well done.

Q. Going back to the comments you made about the salaries and the marketing spending money to make money, how realistic do you think it is for an AD to say, okay, I'm going to spend this money on your program, your budget every year, your salaries for you and your assistant coaches, to if not make money, at least get attendance, do those sorts of things to create a larger buzz in the community, the sorts of things that are in a men's coaching contract, do you see those things starting to potentially creep in with the more money that's being spent?

COACH BLAIR: I think that's right. And I

think as coaches, as politicians or whatever, we need to become more accountable. We need to give back more to the game and to the community.

That is my strength. I'm everywhere, whether it's I've been a rotarian for 20 years. I speak at every group. I speak free. I'm not in that big speaking bureau that they get 10,000 for each speech and all that. I've never been paid for a speech in my life. I'm not sure if I would take it, though.

But at the same time I want to go out into the community. Too many coaches think their job is just winning and losing, and entertaining a few of the big money people that are supporting your program. You need to go to the other events.

Tom Crean was here watching the game last night, sitting over there by the Stanford section over there. I love to see other head coaches come to other sports. Can you make that time? Can you divide your family time with your official duties of being a head coach? Are you doing it because it's expected or is this part of your personality? And I think that's where we have to grow our game in marketing.

No matter how much money they give you, the head coach of that sport and the assistants and a couple of the top players need to continue to give back in the community world.

We do that all the time. At 8:00 tonight, we're winning the award, the Kyale (phonetic) award for the number one school in the nation that donated back to the Kyale award. And that's very special.

We will be there. No matter what our preparation time is, we will be there at 8:00 to receive that award, because we worked very hard at that.

We sold our jerseys afterwards in an auction. We had to go by the NCAA rules. You cannot have your name on the back. Danielle Adams' jersey went for \$10,000. Sydney Colson's went for 75. We raised 34,000 there just on 14 jerseys.

And then what the usual things that we do for the Kyale fun run. Those things are important. But then that's all part of A&M giving back.

With the salaries being given to us now, I've got three coaches in my league that are making over a million dollars. They're worth it to their university. Okay? Sheri Coale, Gail and Kim Mulkey, they are worth it, particularly Kim at Baylor, because they're not winning in too many other sports at Baylor, but Kim Mulkey's got almost a lifetime contract that they can't afford to buy out if

they even wanted her to go somewhere else or she wanted to go.

Why not? It's good. I have no buyout in my contract. My AD and myself, he knows this is my last job, and I'm going to go as long as I'm productive. And if I'm not productive, then I'm going to step aside and hopefully my assistant coach, Vic Schaefer, will be able to have that job.

Q. Question about Sydney Colson. You talk about a breakthrough for Texas A&M and maybe other players, but Colson has a chance to finish out her career against Pohlen who is highly regarded and Skylar Diggins, just what do you think that means for her as a point guard who you've seen develop who hasn't gotten the national recognition, typically, who is just kind of now getting it?

COACH BLAIR: Before we came over here, we had breakfast. And we watched the breakdown, offensive breakdown of the game. And Coach Schaefer was going bananas. We need to show Notre Dame.

I said, no, we need to show our team success and failure. Sydney Colson needs to sit there and look at the turnovers that she made and a couple of the bad decisions, and the good decisions.

And we go over that. And that's what Sydney has to realize. Now she's in going against these kids that are not freshmen like Odyssey Sims or some of the other young ones that were great during the season but not as great during the playoffs. Seniors are going to lay it out there on the table, because it's their last hurrah.

Sydney Colson is not going to be drafted in the first round. Pohlen is not going to be drafted in the first round. Hopefully they get a chance to continue to play, but their job, they're the CEO of their basketball teams. They are accountable. They are responsible. They're an extension of myself, and we have to be on the same page.

And I'm only as good as my point guard. And I'm also very partial to Indiana point guards because I had two of them at Arkansas that called every play for me for eight years. And so I'm glad to be playing for a national championship in the state of Indiana, where basketball was born.

And it is respected more than football is. So I think that's very important that people around here need to embrace it. If it's more important than football, where are you, Indianapolis? Where are

you, fans? Let's come in from the little small towns, and let's just enjoy basketball. Pick a team to cheer for, but let's get out there and just have a great time on Tuesday night.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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Texas A&M Breakout Quotes

Senior Sydney Colson

On playing for a national championship...

"Nothing has compared to this. This is where we dreamed of being; our plan was to be here from the beginning of the season. When you make your team's goals, you dream of a national championship because that's what you should work for every year. If you are playing women's basketball at this level and you aren't working for a national championship, then what are you doing?"

On the rise of other women's basketball programs...

"Usually, people coming out of high school, the All-Americans, they want to go to the names that are familiar to them, the UConn's the Tennessee's, schools who are known for winning national championships. There's a higher chance that they'll win in the four years they'll be at the school. Maybe it's a good thing that people are introduced to Notre Dame and A&M."

On being mentally and emotionally prepared for the title game...

"If you don't have any emotion right now, there's a problem and something is not clicking in your head. You don't realize that you're playing for the national championship game and if that doesn't get you hyped up, then I don't know what will. A lot of us are tired; we've been going since September. But you are at a point where you are playing for what everybody wants to do, what everybody is working for since the beginning of the season. I think if you can't find a way to be self-motivated whether you're tired or not, I don't know. I know we'll find a way. There's still some left in the tank."

On the women's basketball tournament this year...

"In the games UConn won this year, and Tennessee won, they were close games. They weren't winning by huge margins, by the time they got to the Elite Eight and Final Four matchups. There are teams out there who have players that are maybe holding a grudge that they weren't recruited by those schools. They give it their best shot when they get the opportunity to play them. That's the same thing that we are doing, just showing that we deserve to be here and we belong. I think there's more talent and that some of these teams have so much youth that they'll definitely be here to stay. There are a lot of teams that will be able to make it here to this point for years to come."

On Notre Dame...

"The fact that they have five people on the court who can score and they are just as physical as we are it appears. They have good point guard play, (Skylar Diggins) is able to dish it off and score. They have shooters; they are aggressive in the paint. We are

pretty much a mirror image of one another. I think it is going to be a really good game.”

On playing their best basketball of the season...

“I think it’s awesome that we are starting to peak at this point and that we are playing as well as we are playing at this point in the season. We are doing the things that we were capable of doing all season. I think there were spurts during the season. The fact that we are at this point in the season because of what worked, we are really excited about that. It shows that hard work really does pay off. As cliché as it sounds, but all the work we put in has paid off.”

On learning from their tournament disappointments from previous seasons...

“I think in each of those losses, you don’t even need to see the film at the end of the game. We were upset because we didn’t leave it all out there on the line. A lot of our seniors left sad because they had regrets about the game. Our seniors this year said, ‘We don’t want to go out on a bad note, if we are going to go out on a loss, I am going to go out there and I am going to be dag-gum tired and it’s going to be the best effort I’ve given at Texas A&M.’ That’s what we did in the last few minutes against Stanford. We didn’t want our season to end.”

Junior Tyra White

On whether it was a shock to learn to play with defensive intensity Coach Blair looks for:

“It was a shock coming out of high school where it was pretty much all about offense. But after awhile you get used to it. Practices could be more intense than the game. I had to learn how to take charges and stuff like that.”

On the comeback vs. Stanford:

“We had to lean on each other and hold each other accountable for the things we do. It was a situation just like we do in practice and that leads on to the game.”

On loss to Kansas State:

“It taught us not to overlook anybody. Not to go in comfortable and let our egos take over. It was a blessing in disguise. We learned to not overlook anyone, especially going into the tournament.”

Freshman year after knee injury:

“It was hard, but it gave me the chance to see everything. ... I had the chance to mature and grow into the woman that I am.”

On process when she knew she wasn’t going to LSU:

“I talked to my mom about a lot of things. The main thing was she just wanted me to get my degree. I had talked to Coach (Johnnie) Harris when she was at Arkansas and that was the main thing. Coach Harris – she’s like my mom away from home.”

On Final Four:

“This means a lot for our program. We’ll keep fighting. We’ll keep pushing. Our thought was to just come out and win the first game. We’ve always had faith we could compete at this level. We just want to leave it all out on the court.”

On no UConn-Stanford re-match:

“Nobody really picked A&M and Notre Dame to be here. It kind of messes up everybody’s bracket, but we’re building our own legacy.”

On Sydneys:

“They bark at each other. Colson has a big dog bark. Carter’s is more like a little Chihuahua.”

“Colson is a tremendous point guard. I’ve known her since AAU ball. It says a lot about her that even with the six turnovers last night she could deliver. She had trust in me when she made that pass. ... We always know Carter is going to get tired, but she’ll defend a point guard out there to the end.”

Junior Adaora Elonu

On preparing for Notre Dame:

“Yeah, we’ll be ready. The coaches, I’m sure, they’ve been working on it since last night so they’ll keep us ready. Then in practice we’ll see what we can take advantage of on offense, what they want to do and how we can take that away.”

On winning a national championship:

“We have another game in order to achieve our goal. Just thinking about the forty minutes and I don’t want to jump too ahead but at the same time knowing what history we can make and bring to Texas A&M. It’s just something to think about. The coaches are doing a good job of keeping us focused.”

On how to balance emotions:

“Keeping a good balance, knowing we can still be excited but not over-excited thinking we shouldn’t belong here but knowing that we want to be here and just using that to play and keep us motivated and driven is something we work on balancing. Our coaches constantly tell us we deserve to be here and we can still be excited about it and just play like that on the court.”

On being a student-athlete:

“We keep in contact with our teachers through email. Our academic advisor makes sure we email our teachers to ensure we get our tests done and assignments. It’s not as hard as it seems like it could be.”

Thoughts on Final Four:

“It’s been very good. I’m not really accustomed to this but at the same time all the questions we’ve been asked keeps us focused on the game. It gets us thinking what people are expecting of us or not expecting of us and what we need to do so these questions in the interviews have been very helpful for us.”



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Texas A&M Locker Room Quotes

Freshman Karla Gilbert

On her freshman season ...

"It's been amazing. We've always had high expectations, but we never put a limitation on how far we can go and I'm just amazed about how well we have stuck together throughout everything. We have great chemistry and I believe we have worked really hard and we deserve to be here."

On what she expects the frontcourt play to be like in the National Championship...

"I believe it will be an aggressive game tomorrow. Both teams will be crashing the boards hard and blocking out will be an issue as it has been for the past couple of games we have had. Getting them off the boards will make a big difference in the game."

Junior Kelsey Assarian

On Notre Dame ...

"We definitely know about their All-American point guard in Skylar Diggins and we know they are a really tough team. They are not the tallest team we have ever played, but we don't have a lot of height on our team either. I think they play similar to us in that they are a tough, fighting team not willing to go down easily."

On the season and getting to this point ...

"This is an amazing experience. I think most people didn't put us here and I'd say a majority of people didn't put us here with Notre Dame. This just shows the amount of work we have put in to this and I think as a team, we knew what we were capable of and we knew that we are the hardest workers in America and we could get to this point. So, it's just an amazing feeling to know that the work we have been putting in is paying off."

On how critical rebounding will be against Notre Dame ...

"Rebounding is always critical for us, we always stress rebounding. Coach Schaefer always says rebounding is probably one of the most important things in the game. Our defense is really great on first-chance shots, but sometimes second-chance shots are what get us. We are going to have to limit their rebounds and also get our own rebounds and get those second-chance shots."

Senior Maryann Baker

On their pressure defense in facing Notre Dame...

"It has held up against every opponent we have faced this year. We are going into the game expecting the same results...forcing teams into doing things they are not comfortable with doing, getting them out of their flow of offense and just trying to disrupt them like we did with Stanford. Notre Dame has a great point guard in All-American, Skylar Diggins. That matchup will be a key for us but at the same time we have a pretty good little guard in Sydney Carter so I expect that to go in our favor."

On playing for the national championship...

"It's amazing. This is what we set out to do from the beginning of the year so it's great to finally see that goal come full circle. We have been on big stages before but to say we are going for the whole thing feels special, at the same time, we have to stay focused. Notre Dame is a great team. We have our hands full, they are big, they are physical, and it should be a great matchup."

On the importance of rebounding against Notre Dame

"Rebounding was a focus going into the Stanford game and in the final stat line we were outrebounded by 10 overall but we did do a good job of controlling the offensive boards. We can hang our hat on that a little bit and continue to improve. Rebounding is all about focus. You are either going to be focused or you simply are not going to box out. Notre Dame is a great rebounding team and they are big. Our focus will have to be like it was against Stanford and just fine tune some things."

Senior Danielle Adams

On the team's physical play:

"I had the presence throughout this whole time playing against great post players in the tournament and regular season to learn to deal with their physicality and give it back to them. It's most of my game being that presence inside for our team to succeed."

On fatigue being a problem with the team:

"Fatigue hasn't been a worry for us. We've just needed to rest up, watch film and just focus in practice and keep bringing the intensity that we've brought since day one. It's all paying off for us now and we're playing really well."

On the team's mental strength throughout the tournament:

"We see this as a business trip. We get big wins, take the moment in and then get ready for the next task at hand. Our coaches do a great job of settling us down. We know what we came here to do and we celebrated the moment after Stanford, but we know that now it's time to focus on Notre Dame."

On last night's victory:

"After the game, we were still in awe just because of how well we played and the outcome of the game. Stanford is a pretty good team and we had a hard fight throughout the game. We were down 10 and we knew we didn't want that to be our last game, so we knew we had to step up and work hard to get back in the game. After the game we were still excited, but we knew we had to get focused because we still have one more game to go. Right now, we're focused on

Notre Dame and what we can do defensively tomorrow night.”

On the matchup with Notre Dame:

“We’ve never played Notre Dame before. We’ve watched them on TV a couple of times, so we’re not sure how we’re going to matchup with them. It’ll be interesting to see who we’re going to guard and who’s going to guard us in the game.”

On dealing with Stanford’s athleticism:

“Stanford is a very athletic team and we had some trouble with them in the beginning. But we found ways to score and we got some help on defense as the game went on. It was a very physical and rough game because they’re very long and athletic, so we had to find ways around that.”

On the feeling of being in the national title game:

“We feel great. To beat two number one seeds in the tournament that everyone was expecting to be in the national championship game gives us a lot of confidence. We know we’ve played our best basketball and we need to continue that in the next game. We feel if we do that, we’ll have a great chance to win it all.”

On how she feels about tomorrow being her last game for Texas A&M:

“It’s going to be sad, but it’s going to be enjoyable at the end. I’ve enjoyed playing with these girls in my two years here. Last year’s team was great and this year’s team has been, too. So, it’s going to be sad but I’m going to enjoy the moment at the same time.”

On how she feels about the team being the underdogs:

“We feel confident knowing that we are the underdogs and knowing that we need to go out and play our game and not back down from anything tomorrow night.”

On how she enjoyed last night’s game:

“I had a lot of fun out there. Playing against Stanford, it was a challenge for us. They’re very long and athletic and it was a tall task for us. We felt that the way we pulled through was a great source of momentum for us.”

On the team dynamic heading in to tomorrow’s game:

“We’re going in focused on Notre Dame and going in to practice and watching film knowing that we need to play our game. We can’t play like a team we’re not, so it all comes back to playing pressure defense and letting our offense take what’s given to us.”

On the growth of women’s basketball at Texas A&M because of the style of play:

“Our crowd has grown tremendously because we’re fun to watch and we have a lot to bring to this university. A lot of people love football and love track at A&M and they love those athletes. We’re trying to change the women’s basketball program around to where everybody loves us and comes to our games as well.”

On whether or not the feeling has sunk in yet:

"I think it has, but I'm not looking at it that way. It's just another game for us. I came into yesterday's game thinking that it didn't feel like such a big game, but I think it's starting to sink in now that we're about to play for a national championship. Nobody expected us to do that and for us to be playing in the school's first national championship is making all of the Aggies proud."

Junior Sydney Carter

On Skylar Diggins:

"I think she has a great shot and gets it done on both ends of the court. I can't take anything from her, she is a great player. I don't think we need to do anything different than we have all year. We need to make sure we are up in her jersey. I need to maintain the same pressure I did last night. Containment is really the issue with her. She will get her shots, she's an All-American. You can't take that away from her. She is going to find ways to get her shot up. I need to make sure she doesn't get the looks in there to the post players. We just need the pressure. That is what we are used to doing.

"I have to come in with even more intensity because she is going to give me a challenge with her being left-handed. She is going to get her shots up; she is going to be physical on the offensive end as well. I have to match that with my defensive intensity. I need to make sure she works for anything she gets in the game tomorrow."

On being in the National Championship:

It feels great. Like coach said, no one expected us to be here. It feels great to have people jumping on the bandwagon late. It is just an overwhelming feeling. We were having so many issues at the beginning of the season. We never imagined saying we were actually playing in the national championship. It is surreal right now. Every college athlete wants to be here. We are fortunate enough to have this opportunity, so we just have to seize the moment.

On what this does for the A&M program:

"I think it definitely puts us on the map. We could potentially have more people wanting to come to A&M. Hopefully players will want to work as hard as we do when they see our effort. I think it really helps us out a lot recruiting wise. It gets people to think that hard work does pay off and shows them what it is to be a part of a team. We have a complete team. Everyone is involved. I think that people would want to play with a team where everyone is involved; it is not a one-man show."

On Sydney Colson:

"We definitely have that defensive chemistry that we probably do not have with a few of our other teammates, even though we do have really good team defense. I think Sydney really feeds off my energy on the ball if she is guarding the wing, and I definitely feed off of her. I definitely think that we know how to read each other well on the defensive end. We are such balls of fire out there and we are so energetic on the ball. It just helps that we have two people on the team that can do that."

On making people uncomfortable when on defense:

"I can definitely sense when people are uncomfortable. When I have someone just out there dribbling, I know that my teammates are also doing their job behind me. I try to do a good job of reading when a point guard wants the ball and when they don't want the ball."

On Von Miller/DeSoto, TX, connection:

“Von definitely has always been a big supporter of me. He always gives me tips and makes sure he tells me good luck. He is just an inspiration to me. He is just a great role model. I saw that his hard work paid off for him, and it just made me want to work harder every day. He has never not wanted to get better and I think that attitude has definitely rubbed off on me. It feels great to be a part of history back at home, being that I am the first one to ever make it to a Final Four and a national championship game. To win it all would just be a great addition.”

On fatigue towards end of Stanford game:

“I was having some psychological issues out there. My lips were saying ‘you are not tired,’ but my brain and my body were like ‘you are on empty right now.’ I think I just got it together and thought that this was nine minutes for the rest of our seniors’ career, and I am not ready to be done. I just found something inside of me to get myself through it.

“I never want to come out of the game. If he would have taken me out I probably would have been upset and would have asked him to put me back in. I know that he needs me in there to finish the game off and to put the defensive pressure on out there. I am one of the best on-ball defenders out there. I definitely did not want to come out.”

On role:

“I think that my role on this team is to be a great defensive player and to help my team out as much as possible on the defensive end. I think it all starts with me on the ball. If I am making someone uncomfortable out there I think my teammates will feed off my energy. We feed off of playing hard and giving effort. I definitely think it starts with me on the defensive end.”

On coming to A&M and working hard:

“I actually came in willing to work hard, and I think that made it easier for me. I realized, though, that I wasn’t working hard enough because I wasn’t playing that much. It was pretty hard to see that I had people in front of me working harder. So I knew I had to do something to push me over the edge. When I started doing the small things that other people weren’t doing, it got a little bit easier for me.”

On A&M defense being surprising:

I definitely think that we hit them with something they do not expect. It definitely confuses them and they really don’t know what is going on out there. I give credit to my teammates and coaches for being able to execute out there what we have worked on. That is all focus out there on our end. Defensive pressure is really our game and we are trying to keep that intensity, whether we are playing man or zone.

On being underestimated:

“It definitely feels good to prove them wrong. You always want to do over and above what people think you can do. I think this team has definitely lived up to the high expectations that we had for ourselves. There weren’t too many high expectations for us. At the beginning of the year we would never have imagined that we would be here, but we definitely are not satisfied. Anytime you prove someone wrong it is an overwhelming feeling.”

Her feelings on seeing empty seats in the crowd:

“You expect to see more Aggies out there, but like Coach [Blair] said, we are trying to convert them. It is nice to have your family out there. As long as our families are here, the fan support is good enough for us. The people who are supporting us are doing a great job; I couldn’t ask for anything more from those fans.

We feed off of that energy.”

Other ND players that are a threat:

“[Devereaux] Peters does a really good job. She has a great presence in the lane and she does a great job of extending when she is on the defensive end and blocking shots. [Natalie] Novosel is a great offensive player for them; she really impacts the basket and has a physical nature on the offensive end. [Becca] Bruszewski is a great role player for them. I think she does a great job of pinning the ball and getting some rebounds for them. They are an all-around great team and you can’t really stop one person. You have to make sure you are containing everybody.”

Bounce back from last night:

“I think it is a matter of being smart about it. Honestly, I am going to rely on my adrenaline to take me through this game. There is so much on the line. This is going to be my last game with our seniors. I want to go out with a bang and finish it all. With so much being on the line, I do not think that being tired and physically fatigued will be a factor just because of what is riding on this game.”

On Tyra White:

“I call her our styling assassin. She is a quiet person when it comes to media time. Off the court, she is social with us. Most of the time, everyone is laughing at me and Sydney [Colson]. On the court, she is such a key for us because she can do so much on the offensive end. On the defensive end she has been so huge for us in so many games. We need her height to stop some of those taller players I am not able to stop because of my height. She is just so big for us. She has pulled out some wins for us with so many big baskets.”

On talk about “usual suspects”:

“I think that UConn and Tennessee have earned their place up there. It is just great for our program that we have made it here; that we have made history. It just puts us on the map. I think that people are really going to start talking about A&M now. We have brought ourselves into the spotlight. It says a lot for this program and where we have come from. We took some long strides and we are just looking to continue this and we are enjoying our success.”

On how far program has come:

“When I got here freshman year we had some great players and it just didn’t work out for us that year. We have come so far from the beginning of the year. We were all just fighting against each other and it wasn’t a team at all. We just banded together and we said this was a family and we have to come together as a team. Once we realized that, we have been very successful and we have come a long way.”

On when intervention was:

“I think it hit when the first practice hit. It is not worth all the fighting we have been doing. We realized there is no use in fighting over the small stuff.”

On Coach Blair resurrecting program:

“He did a great job of recruiting players. There is a method to his madness. I think he is a genius for that. It is about who is going to do what it takes to get to that final point. We have a lot of people on this team that are willing to work hard. He has the big business side, but he is so social with us off the court. He will just have fun with us. He can have that soft side to that strong side we have in practice.