

April 4, 2011



An interview with:



THE MODERATOR: Joining us is Muffet McGraw, Skylar Diggins, Devereaux Peters, Natalie Novosel, Brittany Mallory and Becca Bruszewski. We'll start with an open format. We'll take questions for everyone up on the dais.

Q. Skylar, I'm going to ask you the question probably everyone in this room wants to know. Two-part question. How does it feel to have Lil Wayne tweet at you and what do you think that does for the promotion of women's basketball, having your name out there by a huge celebrity? Do you think it will help at all?

SKYLAR DIGGINS: He's a huge artist, one of the top artists in the country. Me and my teammates listen to him a lot. That was tight, him tweeting at us and wishing us luck. And I'm like, I didn't know we were married, but, I guess -- no, but this is huge.

Obviously he has -- him saying that and him just watching the game and watching us play, I think that says a lot about how big women's basketball is becoming and how much it appeals to all audiences.

Q. Coach, can you talk about the matchups and just the two styles of play that these teams have?

COACH MCGRAW: They're a great defensive team. Probably a little bit like West Virginia in the Big East and then some. They really get up and guard people.

I thought their pressure is why they won the game last night. They also can score. They have got great guard play. They've got great inside play.

Danielle Adams is a difficult matchup for us. We haven't really faced anybody like her. That's going to be a challenge for our defense. And our guards, they all have tough matchups. So it's going to be a defensive battle, I think.

Q. Can you talk about coming full circle? Ten years ago you were in the Final Four in the championship game, beat UConn in the semifinals, and now you did it again and now you're back in the championship again.

COACH MCGRAW: Yeah, I'm enjoying the circle. We had our championship reunion in the fall and the team came in. They presented a ball to this team and said, you know, 'We've won our championship; now it's your turn.'

And I don't know that anybody expected it would be this year. I think that we believed in ourselves, but I'm not sure that a lot of people thought we were ready.

So I think it's been interesting, playing Connecticut again, Skylar making Third-Team All-American and Niele Ivey making Third-Team All-American. There are a lot of parallels.

It was a very emotional game, the same as the one was back in 2001.

Q. Skylar, what do you know about Sydney Carter or [Sydney] Colson? Have you seen them on film? Watched them on television? Does their pressure remind you of anyone you might have faced this year?

SKYLAR DIGGINS: I've had the chance to play with Syd Carter. She's actually one of my good friends from USA Basketball. She was one of my roommates. I've seen her in the trials. She's a great defender on the ball, has a great mid-range jump shot and very good speed. She's going to be up in your face and a pest on defense. We have to make sure we protect the ball.

Syd Colson, I've been watching her since before I was in college. She's a great player, too, one of the quickest players, one of the fastest players to the rim in the country.

She's going to run the team, she's a very heady point guard who knows where her teammates like to score. She's going to be another good on-the-ball defender.

Q. Coach, can you talk about A&M's guards, how they play against teams with taller guards, and do other teams try to take advantage of that?

COACH MCGRAW: You know, their guards are so quick and up on the ball. Their full-court pressure really takes you out of what you want to do offensively.

I haven't seen a lot of teams try to post them up. I think they're physical. They're strong. They're aggressive. They've got great on-the-ball pressure which makes it hard to throw it in the post.

It's going to be a challenging matchup.

Q. Coach, your counterpart from Texas A&M, Gary Blair, said you guys screwed it all up for the powerhouses whether, it's UConn or Baylor or Stanford, all the teams that were expected to be here. But he also joked that why not like the pretty faces of his and yours in this game. Could you speak to how this affected your team or mindset about the same old same old not playing out?

COACH MCGRAW: I thought it was great throughout the month of March, before the brackets came out, when the first top four seeds were so obvious to everyone.

And I thought that was a good thing because we were able to fly under the radar. I don't think that anybody was talking about us. They were talking about the top four seeds the whole time.

So it made it a little bit easier to come in and be the underdog, and to maybe get the upsets that we've had.

I know that playing in the state of Indiana has been huge, and we are expecting big crowds tomorrow. Everybody in South Bend hopefully is on their way down here for the game, because we had so much green in there last night we really want this to be a home court game.

Q. Skylar, is this place like a second home for you on the court? I think you won three titles here, now you've won the biggest game of your college career here, and you have a big one tomorrow night.

SKYLAR DIGGINS: Obviously I've had some experience on this court, played three state championships here, and with USA Basketball. So it's just great. Every time I come here I know that my team has opportunities to do great things and this is another one of those times.

And Hoosier basketball, you know, you can't even put into words how important this sport is to the state. And like Coach said, a lot of fans are going to come out and support us. A lot of Indy alumni are here, and a lot are going to come down.

Like I said, when we had a state championship, when we play here, South Bend is going to be a ghost town. And we want that again for tomorrow. And hopefully with the home crowd giving us momentum and being anything like they were last night, we'll have a very good chance of being a national champion.

Q. Brittany [Mallory], Natalie, Devereaux, could you give us a sense of what you did after the game? How late did you stay up, were you able to sleep?

BRITTANY MALLORY: I'll go. It was an unbelievable feeling. We all believed in ourselves that we were going to get this far and it was just a matter of executing, and we had a great welcoming at the hotel last night when we came in, with our friends and family and fans.

And it was a little hard to go to sleep, but we knew we had to settle down and get ready for Tuesday.

Q. What time did you get to sleep?

BRITTANY MALLORY: 2:30.

DEVEREAUX PETERS: It was just great. It feels really surreal. We joked around this morning it felt like a dream. The world's out of tilt. It's raining outside. Don't know what's going on, but it's a great feeling to be here.

Q. Becca, you potentially could have a tough matchup if you end up guarding Adams. What have you seen of her, and what do you think about that matchup?

BECCA BRUSZEWSKI: She's definitely a dynamic post player. She likes to go outside more than inside. She likes the jump shot. It's definitely going to be challenging for us. It's not the typical post player we're used to seeing where they're fighting for position inside.

But she's got a great jump shot, and she's really a contester.

Q. Coach, can you talk about how you've evolved as a teacher, as a coach, and in particular the job you've done with this team this year to bring them from a team that a lot of people weren't taking notice of early, now you're in the title game?

COACH MCGRAW: I think I've tried to be a little more patient than I normally am, which is pretty hard for me. But I've been, I think, a lot more relaxed. And because of them, I think they get me relaxed.

When I look at them in the pregame and getting ready for the game, it just kind of takes the weight off my shoulders, because I know they're ready to go.

Becca's got the team ready every game, their attitude, their intensity, their focus. I never have to worry about if we're going to show up tonight.

And I think that really -- it makes it more fun. I've really enjoyed coaching this team. I've enjoyed this journey we've been on.

And I think it's been, for me, trying to help them more instead of telling them what they're doing wrong, because all of them are perfectionist-type people. They know when they're making mistakes. They usually say it before I can.

So it's made it easier to talk about what we need to do. This is what might work, let's try this, instead of going over what we've done wrong. That's how I feel about them.

Q. Coach, how do you deal with the emotional -- actually both teams are facing -- the emotional letdown of a big win, huge win, two days earlier, now they have to come back and get on that same roller coaster back up? How are you approaching that?

COACH MCGRAW: I think we have some good practice after the Tennessee game. That was such a huge emotional game. Then we got home at 3:00 in the morning. And you're just tired. And you really want -- just want to get back out there and play again rather than practice.

So I think for us, again, the focus this team's been able to bring every day, I'm not worried about whether or not they're going to be ready.

It was similar in 2001, we beat Connecticut and everyone said that should have been the final. But we still had to play one more game.



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And so I think kind of our motto has been we've got to finish. We've got to finish this, 40 minutes in every game, and we want to finish it.

Q. Becca and Skylar, this is your first Final Four but for Coach McGraw it's her third. Can you talk about how her experience, the things she's been through, has helped both of you? And also maybe you could share what ways Coach McGraw most impacted you guys as players.

BECCA BRUSZEWSKI: I would just say her patience. Like she said before, I mean, she definitely has the experience. She's been here before. And just the way she's approached the games and approached us on and off the court, that it's just a total different mindset than the first three years when I was here.

And, again, having Niele Ivey on staff is excellent, because she's been here. She has the experience, she's also in the locker room to get us fired up before we go out and play. And she's been there before.

SKYLAR DIGGINS: Coach's basketball IQ is so high. She's a Hall of Fame coach for a reason. She knows exactly what we need to do to be prepared. I think she knows how much needs to go into a team that's looking to play at this level.

And we definitely are like sponges. We listen to her, and, like she said, our focus and how we're able to be on each other, we try to help take pressure off her.

And with her being so patient, we talk to a couple of the players here from years ago, and they're like, 'She's so much easier on y'all than she was on us.' And I'm like, 'Well, yeah.'

But she's had a lot of patience with us. Obviously we're a young team, and I think with her being patient with us and talking to us like she does, and with the help, I mean, Coach Carol Owens and Coach Niele Ivey, who has been there, you know, we're just able to put together an awesome year.

Q. Brittany, I'm just curious, how many times have you hit the floor this year? And how did you develop your mentality as far as you play?

BRITTANY MALLORY: I've hit the floor quite a few times. I'm pretty sure all of you know that.

I've just been brought up that way, playing

against my brother in the cul-de-sac, and pushing me in the basketball net because I was about to win.

I've always been brought up to be tough, and with my team behind me and knowing that if I make a mistake they're right there. So if I get beat on the dribble they're right there. So why not give all you have the full 40 minutes that you're playing each game?

Q. Coach, at halftime yesterday, Natalie had almost as many points as she had fouls. What was your message to her at halftime? What was your frame of mind at halftime in regards to her and how she changed it around?

COACH MCGRAW: We really didn't even have to talk about it much, because she knew. And I feel like almost all year long Skylar's been kind of getting us off in the first half and Natalie takes over in the second half.

We've had a number of games we've kind of joked about it. One does the first half, one does the second. So I just expected that she was going to come out and play well.

She was determined to come out and play well. So, really, we didn't need to talk about it at all.

Q. All of you, can you talk about the job your support staff, the trainers, the managers, the videographers have done to get you here, especially in the postseason?

SKYLAR DIGGINS: They've been amazing. Especially our strength and conditioning coach, you know, trying to keep our bodies right, our trainers, who have put in an endless amount of hours working with us, and massage therapists. I think they've all worked together to make sure our bodies are right.

Then you have the people that work behind the scenes who don't get a lot of -- they don't get to be the hero. But I think they're the unsung hero of the group, just being our support and being someone, people that we can talk to. You have to thank the managers and everybody.

It really is a total team thing, and they are included in this team. And we really appreciate them.

COACH MCGRAW: I think if there's one person I couldn't be happier for it is Chris Masters. I don't think anybody associated with our program works harder for us, is more positive towards our team.

Anytime things start to look a little shaky for me, he comes in with a positive outlook of some fact that he found that is going to make me smile. And he's done a magnificent job. We're very lucky to have him.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies. Questions for Coach McGraw.

Q. Can you talk about what this year's experience will mean for next year's team? You're only losing one player. Is there carry-over?

COACH MCGRAW: I think there's definitely a little carry-over. But you're just not guaranteed anything. Getting here this year doesn't mean that because we have everybody back but Becca that we're going to be back here next year.

And that's something we'll have to guard against after the season. We can't get complacent. We know how hard we worked to get here. This was an unbelievable effort by everybody to get here.

I think we want to enjoy this and worry about next year after the season.

Q. Two-part question. First, this is the second straight year that Indianapolis is hosting a Final Four, the men last year and the women this year, and you have a hometown team in Butler playing and now you guys a home state team playing. How cool is that for Indiana basketball? And, second part, different tone, Gary Blair said it's great for the game of women's basketball having you guys and them playing as opposed to UConn or Tennessee or Stanford. Could you talk about that, how great it is for the sport having you guys?

COACH MCGRAW: We thought about watching *Hoosiers* on the way down, and it's certainly a great thing for the state of Indiana. Indianapolis is a great sports town. Great place to host, easy to get around. People love the city. There are a lot of things to do. People have come out and supported us, the volunteers have been great, and being three hours away you saw how many Notre Dame fans we had last night. We hope to get twice as many as that in the next game.

So I think everybody's -- I see a lot of people wearing Butler shirts while they're at our games, and we're cheering for them, too.

And the second part, I think a lot of people were happy to see a different face in the final game. I think it's great what Connecticut's done for the Big East and for women's basketball, and I think it's also great to have some new teams come in and maybe appeal to a lot more people.

Q. Coach McGraw, I tend to think of you as sort of an acerbic quick wit, and Gary really doesn't say anything quickly, as a Texan, but he talked about how much he admires you recruiting players that want to be at Notre Dame; he recruits the kind that want to be at Texas A&M and play that style. Can you maybe talk about your relationship with him over the years and what you think of the programs both you guys have built?

COACH MCGRAW: He's done an amazing job, I think, coming in there, and has had so much success later in his career after taking Arkansas to the Final Four, then he went to Texas A&M.

He has assembled an amazing team. I mean, I think he's somebody that's well liked by his peers, because he's just such a gregarious guy.

And he doesn't say anything quickly. I think he really has to have a little bit of time, if you're going to run into him.

But he's done an amazing job. I think everybody respects the job he's done in the Big 12 and the players he's gotten, not always highly recruited by other people but he gets the right kids for his system.

That's similar to what we try to do. We want to try to get the right fit. Something I learned early on: It's not about the talent, it's about the chemistry for me. I want people that I want to coach; I want people that like being together. I think when you have good chemistry, you get along, you like where you are, you like who you're with, I think it's a lot easier to win.

Q. Another thing Gary talked about a little bit this morning was the challenges and also accomplishments of building a women's basketball program at a school where football is like a religion. Can you talk about developing your program juxtaposed with the predominance of football in South Bend?

COACH MCGRAW: We love that Notre Dame is a huge football school. And especially now, when we're on the upswing, it's even more exciting.

I think they're in the newspaper all the time. Everybody wants to hear about Notre Dame football. So when you see Notre Dame in the paper, we feel like it helps us. Recruiting takes place mostly on a football weekend.

We're in the first row behind the end zone when the team comes in, the first ones that they see, we're on TV a lot cheering for them.

Our team loves to go to the games. I think that's a big part of Notre Dame. I think if you don't like football, you're probably not going to come to Notre Dame.

Again, we want people to have that fit for Notre Dame. So that's an important part of it for us. Brian Kelly will talk to our recruits. He'll do whatever he can to help us.

We have a really good relationship with their coaches. And they've been very helpful in the short time they've been there.

Q. I understand you had more than 30 former players in attendance. Can you talk a little bit about what that means to you, that players are coming in from all over the country to be there?

COACH MCGRAW: That's one of the best parts. I think after we beat Tennessee I got texts and e-mails from former players and they were working on getting here for this game, and from so many different eras.

When you're here as long as I've been here, there were people even before I got here that played back in the beginning and then all throughout the '97 team and the '80s and the '90s and the championship group and thereafter.

It's been amazing to see so many people come back and kind of relive those old stories and talk about things. But they're also proud. That's probably the biggest thing they've all said: I'm so proud to be a Notre Dame alum.

Q. Let's see. AP took my first question, so we'll go with another question. Talk about the possibility of a new dynasty beginning with Notre Dame and Texas A&M and some of the schools that really have flown under the radar. We've got a lot of graduations coming up on the East Coast and the West Coast. So if you can talk a little bit about that.

COACH MCGRAW: Well, we would love to see some new teams come up and be the ones that everybody's talking about every year. And I

think it's what you work for as a coach to get your team to be one of those programs.

Certainly when you look at what Connecticut has accomplished over the years, it's amazing to see the wins they have had, the success they've had. Geno's done an amazing job as coach.

And I thought he did the best coaching job of his career this year. It's been great for the Big East to have that always out there. I think we're still going to see the same teams. I think Tennessee is going to be a good team next year. Stanford will be a good team. There's always those underdogs that everybody roots for, and I'm not sure if we're still considered an underdog in the big picture, but we definitely like the fact that we have a pretty young team coming back. We've got a great young sophomore point guard who is making her mark, and we're looking forward to the future.

Q. A little bit off point here. A salary question. You and Gary represent coaches with long histories who have risen to the top of your profession, have good contracts, long-term contracts, now with sizable money. Can you talk about whether that validates the women's game within the greater athletic picture and perhaps what market forces have enabled you to rise to this level in your profession?

COACH MCGRAW: I think it's great that we're approaching some sort of equality with what the men have. I don't think we're quite there yet. But it's nice to have that reward for doing the same job that they do and handling the same pressures that they do.

I think the downside of that you're seeing coaches getting fired a little bit quicker. I think the movement in the women's game is not nearly what it is in the men's game. And I think that's more of a woman's issue, I think people get comfortable at one place and want to stay there.

But I think when we all started out, you know, I was making \$1,500 coaching at Saint Joe's in Philly. And we certainly didn't get in this profession for the money. We got into it because we love what we're doing.

But it is nice at this point in our career to be rewarded for it.

Q. Muffet, a bit of a left turn. Tara VanDerveer was enshrined in the Naismith Hall of Fame today, and there are 11 women total in

the Naismith Hall of Fame, and not that many coaches. I wondered what your reaction would be on the accomplishment.

COACH MCGRAW: That's an amazing accomplishment to be in the Hall of Fame and great that they have 11 women. I didn't even know that. I knew she was going to be enshrined. She certainly deserved it. She's one of the icons in our game. And we've got a few of them.

I think we're getting to that point where you look at the numbers that our coaches are racking up the wins, and it's really -- it's pretty amazing all the great coaches that we have in the women's game.

Q. Coach Blair said this morning, he's a little concerned next year about the Final Four being in Denver because there isn't that fan base. Along the lines of growing the game, there's concerns, I would think, is the game ready to grow? Probably not going to have the strongest ratings that ESPN would like Tuesday night just because it's not the UConn-Tennessee matchup or UConn-Stanford that they would enjoy. Is the game ready to grow to have you guys and A&M in the finals and have a game which may not draw the best ratings and if it wasn't in Indianapolis wouldn't have a sold-out arena tomorrow night?

COACH MCGRAW: I think the women's game has grown, and we're definitely getting better every year. I think we see that in the first and second rounds sometimes at a neutral site. We see that in the regionals sometimes. I thought the committee did a really good job this year of putting -- at least in Dayton we had Tennessee and Ohio State and Notre Dame. So I think they're trying to do that. In Dallas you had some teams from Texas.

You hope when you get to the Final Four level that you have enough interest in the city because they're bidding on it that they're going to fill the crowd, but I think it's better when you have the fans, you know, the fans of the teams able to get there.

Denver is probably not really close to a lot of places that are going to draw well. So I think that will be a great test for us. I know we're doing pretty well here. I know our fans are going to try to come out and fill this place, so wherever the teams come from next year they'll do the same.

Q. Following up on the whole Naismith announcement, Herb Magee also got elected. Did you cross paths with him the days he was a player or go to his camps?

COACH MCGRAW: I know he spoke at Cathy Rush camp every year I worked there. He's a great shooter. He gave a shooting lecture every year.

An amazing, amazing guy. He's really done well. He's been in the game a long time, given a lot back to the game.

Q. In the Big East, of course, it's almost been like an NCAA Tournament since the beginning of January. Some of the other big teams that went down did not really see that kind of diet. Is that helpful when you get to this point that maybe the change in competition, once you get higher up in the tournament really isn't all that much from what you've seen as opposed to other teams that may not have seen as much along the way?

COACH MCGRAW: I don't think there's any question the Big East is the best conference in basketball. What we had to go through this year to get where we are, I know Geno said it in the past, it's tougher to win the Big East than it is sometimes to win the national tournament.

I know for us, we came in third in the Big East. We played so many good teams that were ranked, but it prepared us so well. I think the rigors of the schedule, night in and night out, really helped us, and when we came up against Oklahoma and Tennessee, I think we looked back and said, this is just like what we faced in the Big East, so we were ready for it.

Q. This is a bit of a stickier question, but I have a radio show on WKRS in Waukegan as well as the SRN gig, and I work with two male co-hosts. And my co-hosts frequently tell me that nobody's interested in women's basketball and people are going to run away from it. And I wanted to know what you would say to them as a coach and as somebody who is passionate about women's basketball and feels like its place is here and now.

COACH MCGRAW: Well, I think we sold out again last night, I think our Final Four has been sold out for -- I don't know how many consecutive years. Somebody want to help me with that?

You know, I think we choose good arenas that fit us, the size fits us, and I think we're growing in leaps and bounds every year. I know our

attendance just continues to grow. Across the country I think attendance is up.

You look at little kids coming up playing. The game is growing at all levels. I think the interest has been tremendous. You see it on TV. You turn on, watching great games, we've got the WNBA.

I think when you look at how long it took the men's game to get to the point they're at, and we're a different game. We're a much different game. We're more like the old NBA back in the day when Walt Frazier was playing and people enjoyed the beauty of the game.

I think that's how our game is.

Q. Muffet, when Gary was hired at A&M, did you expect him to have this type of success? Could you see that coming?

COACH MCGRAW: Well, I thought he did a really good job at Arkansas. And I thought he'd be really comfortable down there. It's a great place for him to build. He really started from scratch and really built it up.

He got great players to come in. He's got a really good staff. I think that's so key the people that you work with. So that was no surprise at all to see how successful they've been the last few years.

Q. Back when you won in 2001, the key component was Ruth [Riley] who was basically a "who" person, and obviously the positions are the same. Now you have Skylar, who is almost similar in background, if not position. When she said I'm coming, did you feel like this is the step that's going to get us back?

COACH MCGRAW: I definitely thought she was a must-have recruit. I think she was the most important recruit we've gotten.

She had probably the most hype coming in, number one player coming in from South Bend. You can't let a kid like that get away from home.

We worked hard for four years. And Niele Ivey was instrumental when I hired her. And I hired her and I said: You've got one job, that's to get Skylar. She worked on it for a couple of years. And we couldn't have been happier when she finally said yes.

We felt like it was years of work and the future was very bright.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.
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Notre Dame Breakout Quotes

Sophomore Skylar Diggins

On team handling being the up-setter:

"A lot of time in the women's game, people think that the higher seed is going to win. When you have two great programs that are always in the Final Four, you expect that. This team doesn't try to pay attention to the media. It is about how much heart you have."

"I thought this team did a great job of focusing on the right things and not paying attention to the negative things that discounted us. The focus of this team has been high. This team loves being around each other. We live in the moment for a little bit, but at some time you have to reel it in. I told my teammates the other day that I could live in this moment forever. We will go into practice and it will be strictly business from then on."

"The women's game has grown so much. We really have to thank those that came before us. Our game is evolving and a lot of people are taking notice of that. This is great for our community and our program. This team has a lot of pride in itself and we are not done yet. The mindset of this team is to win it all."

Excitement about Texas A&M:

"They are one of the best defensive teams in the country. They are very disciplined on defense. We have to make sure we have poise on offense. We have to limit turnovers. A team like that is on the ball so well and that is going to key their transition. We cannot let steals lead to transition points."

On being up last night:

"We were just playing. I didn't recognize the score. When you feel that calm on the court, everything is just flowing. Even though we knew it could happen, you just never know what it feels like. We have in the back of our minds what it feels like it to lose and we don't want to feel it again."

On 2001 championship team and Niele Ivey:

"Something is so eerie about the connection with that team and our team. It was such an exciting time for ND and the South Bend community. To have the opportunity to do that again with this team is amazing. It humbles me to be a part of this team with Coach McGraw and teammates that will put it all on the line for you. They are the most selfless people that I have ever met."

"Coach Ivy has been huge in two transitions in my life: from high school to college and from moving to the two to the one guard. I struggled more than I have in my life with that move. She was a huge part of

helping with that. Sometimes we will watch her games and she will watch with me. Anytime I get a chance to pick her brain I do. I always make sure we are on the same page.”

“The 2001 team did a great job in inspiring us and getting their message through to this team.”

On Brittany Mallory:

“Brittney is one of the girliest girls on the team, but she is tough. Don’t let her fool you. On the court she is a dog. She takes the toughest defensive assignment every game and she loves it. She does a great job. She knows what she needs to do and she does it right the first time. This team relies on Brittney to do that.”

How will this affect next year:

“A lot of people though this team would be good next year, not this year. We knew we wanted to be good this year. Toward the beginning of the year we showed traits you don’t want in a team. We were young, emotionally weak and undisciplined. We have come together as a team.”

“This is definitely going to help us out for next year. It is going to be huge losing Becca, but we bring in four freshmen, three who have won state championships. We know they are going to come in with a lot of confidence, but we will have the experience to help them where they struggle. We will have this experience and we will be able to tell them about it and help them because of it.”

On Natalie Achonwa:

“Natalie is someone that we want to shoot. I go to her for big shots. I call plays for her and she knows that. She made big shot after big shot for us last night. She plays with so much confidence, and when you have a player like that you give her the ball.”

On being at Notre Dame:

“I am exactly where I need to be having my family there with me. I would have been a fool to have gone anywhere else. This is what I dreamed about when I was younger, playing for Notre Dame. It was a motivating factor in my workouts. There is no place I would rather be.”

On facing A&M preparation:

“We really have to focus. It is no secret they are the best defensive team in the nation. We have to use this time we have to make sure we are really tuned in. We just really have to have poise on offense and execute. I have to handle the pressure. I had too many turnovers last night; I can’t do that against A&M.”

On Sydney Carter:

“She is awesome. We follow each other on twitter. She is a great player and she is doing great things with that team this year. She is going to do exactly what she is told. She is awesome on and off the court. It is going to be fun playing against her. It is fun playing against people that you know because you know they are going to challenge you.”

On Twitter followers:

“I have a lot of young girls following me and asking how I handle different situations. I have to understand that I

am a mentor and a role model and act as such.”

On Lil’ Wayne Tweet:

“He didn’t just say Skylar Diggins, he said the Fighting Irish. That was huge, because I know he is watching us and what we are doing. I am having a great time.”

Senior Devereaux Peters

On having an advantage playing in Indiana:

“It was great seeing all the green out there. I wasn’t expecting them to be all the way up to the top of the building, so it was great to see everyone out there getting loud and having that support.”

On comparing Texas A&M’s defense to Notre Dame’s:

“I think they’re very similar to us in that they’re very aggressive and take a lot of pride in their defense, but we do as well. We’ve contained some of the best teams in the country the same way that they have, so it’s going to be a defensive battle. We have a lot of scoring options on offense and we’re going to be put to the test tomorrow with as well as they’ve been playing on defense.”

On guarding Danielle Adams:

“It helps that she’s not on the post a whole lot. She likes to get out on the perimeter and shoot jumpers and that helps us because it allows a lot of our players to come out and guard her, whether it is a bigger guard or post player. If we can get her away from the basket, it will be a huge thing for our defense.”

On seizing the moment in playing for the national championship:

“It’s exciting. You have a lot of your friends and family calling you to congratulate you, but at the same time, it’s not over and we know that. You still have to stay focused for one more game and I think we’ve done a great job with that all year long and for this game as well.”

On staying loose throughout the tournament:

“We’ve been playing really well through the whole season because we’ve been able to stay loose and enjoy the game. The first half yesterday we were really tense and weren’t executing our sets and after halftime we decided we were going to enjoy the moment. Once we got back to feeling comfortable we were able to make a comeback.”

On embracing the underdog role through the year:

“I love playing the underdog because it puts no pressure on you. If nobody expects anything from you, you can go out and have fun. It’s been a lot of fun because we have believed in ourselves all year when others haven’t given us a chance.”

On the matchup with Texas A&M:

“Both teams have put in the work to get here. They’re a great defensive team and their guards are dangerous, so it going to test our offense and to see how far we’ve come because they’re really aggressive

and don't let you have much on offense. I think we're playing great and having fun and that's big because we're able to do what we need to do and still enjoy the moment."

On the dream of playing for a national championship:

"Everything has lived up to expectations. Part of the reason we're here is that we believed we could get here from day one. As soon as we found out the Final Four was in Indianapolis, we set a goal to get there and we just kept telling ourselves in practice that we needed to do everything we could to get to the Final Four. We stayed focused and got better as the year went on and we're finally here."

Junior Natalie Novosel

On preparing for the national championship:

"We're on a roll right now and that second half, we played on another level. It was one of the best halves we played all season and we're just going to keep rolling into this national championship game. It was definitely one of our best halves all year, both offensively and defensively."

On the Notre Dame tradition:

"The green fingernails started 10 years ago. We continued the tradition and have come full circle. I think it's great. We've always done the same thing pre-game throughout this whole year. It's the routineness and it's great."

On Texas A&M:

"We've been watching them all year, a few games here and there, but, they were a tough team against Baylor and they were the same thing against Baylor as we were against Connecticut. They were finally able to meet them and it shows they are kind of like us in a way. They never quit. They are a competitive team and when it comes down to it, it's about their defense. I think it's going to be a great defensive battle tomorrow."

On experiencing a Final Four:

"Unless you've actually been here, no one can imagine how awesome a feeling it is. In a way, it's like proving to all the doubters and no one believed in us, and that's the best feeling that we've been able to prove everyone wrong."

Senior Brittany Mallory

On Texas A&M:

"They have a great post player in Danielle Adams. Their guards are very quick and they can shoot. They all are very fast. We've met teams before, like Temple, who have had three great guards. We are going to be ready for it. It's just a matter of keeping them in front containing the ball."

On their team's run through the tournament this season:

“Coach has changed a little over the last three years and she is more patient, she is calmer. She gets it, she understand when we are having rough days or when we are struggling. A lot of people doubted us coming in because we had lost four starters. We knew if we pulled together, we had the talent and we could go far.”

On the excitement of this year's tournament field:

“Everyone is going to play their best in the NCAA Tournament. Every team who makes the NCAA Tournament has made it for a reason. We and Texas A&M have been playing our best basketball and it couldn't have come at a more perfect time. No one really expected us to be here; everyone expected the four No. 1 seeds. We both came in and knocked off two really good No. 1 seeds and now we are here. I don't think it is a matter of the whole basketball world changing, I think everyone comes out and plays their best in the NCAA Tournament.”

On the comparisons between this team and the 2001 national championship team:

“We've been talking about it all year pretty much on how similar these two teams have been. They had their national championship reunion in the fall, and they gave us a pep talk. Yesterday, we got a big card from them that gave us these inspirational quotes and just related to what it was like when they were in the same situation. The fact that we've had UConn in the semifinal for both teams and ended up winning, it's crazy how similar it is.”

On the team's toughness:

“It's going to take a lot for us to sit out a game. With Becca (Bruszewski) hurting her knee and coming back and being able to play with that brace, she is more confident now. We've battled through a lot. We are just tough, that is all there is to it. We battle in practice, we want to win all the time, whether we are in practice and it's on the court and right after we are fine. We might yell at each other in practice, get a little mad, but we are just competitive and that's really where it comes from.”

On the team's mindset against Texas A&M:

“Texas A&M is a great team and when they beat Baylor, I looked at them saying, 'If they can do it, why can't we,' and we were going into yesterday's game thinking we were going to win the game. We are similar teams and our mindset coming in is really it is just another game. It's another game we have to focus on for a full 40 minutes. Our team philosophy is to play great team defense. We've played teams with great guards, great posts. We have Danielle Adams we have to guard. It's going to be tough keeping them in front of us but it's nothing we haven't seen before. It's about being in the right position at the right time, rotation and playing as a team.”

On playing close to campus:

“We had a great fan base last night and we even had students at our game. We hardly have a big student section at our home games, so seeing them at the top with their stomachs painted and making signs was a great feeling. We need to win this for our program and more importantly our fans. They've been through it all with us, they've traveled to games in Florida; it would be great to go out and win this national championship.”

Senior Becca Bruszewski

On Danielle Adams of Texas A&M:

“She’s big as a post player, but she also likes to play on the wing. I had tendencies like that when I was a sophomore, but now I’m strictly a post player, so I could get a feel for how she’s going to get there. She’s a great player – it’s going to be tough.”

On playing against similar opponents:

“I’m not so concerned anymore about how big or how strong they are. I’ve gone up against Mercedes Walker of Pittsburgh my freshman year, and Candace Parker. It’s another game, another opponent that you need to work on to be ready to shut down.”

On losses early this season:

“I definitely think it was us as a young team learning the sticks and stones of the road and getting over the bumps. We have a lot of people we rely on. In the beginning, it was tough on all of us to get a feel for how we were going to do it and who was going to do what and the roles. But I think it’s only helped us get stronger. Either you continue to lose and get upset about it, or you look at the game film, look at yourselves and improve to get us where we are today.”

On Muffet McGraw:

“She gets nervous at times, but as the season has gone on, she’s gotten more and more confident in us and that makes us have confidence in ourselves.”

On progress this season:

“We’ve grown up and learned how to stay poised and controlled, knowing that every possession matters. We were a little careless at times and trying to do a little too much. I think as the season went on, we learned to stick to the game plan and produce what we needed to do.”

On preparing for a new opponent in Texas A&M:

“The definitely remind us a little bit of West Virginia – just their defensive intensity. It’s hard to prepare for a team in entirety, looking at game film, you can look at tendencies and how they run their offense. They’re a real aggressive team. And if anything, this tournament has taught us to stay composed, never give up and take it one step at a time. Get a feel for what we can do and how to stop them. They’re a team that comes and goes on runs. They’re a team we need to take seriously and continue to keep our composure and react to it. We’ll need to match their defensive intensity and out do it, in a way.”

On fourth game against UConn:

“We took a little bit from each game. One thing was the way we were guarding Stefanie Dolson. We needed to keep her outside and not let her set up in the post. We knew Maya Moore was going to get her points, but we needed to contain everyone else. Tiffany Hayes, Bria Hartley – I think we did a good job on them.”



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Notre Dame Locker Room Quotes

Sophomore Kaila Turner

On the Texas A&M guards...

"Their guards are really quick and they have really good on-the-ball defense and they try to deny each pass. I feel like we have really good ball handlers on our team and if we handle the pressure well and take care of the ball, we will be fine."

On the season and reaching the championship game...

"At the beginning of the year we practiced really hard and pushed each other really well. We believed in each other from day one and it is exciting to see all of our hard work come through and show all of the doubters that we are a tough team and we came here to win."

On what the atmosphere will be like at game time ...

"First of all, there are no other fans like Notre Dame fans. We expect it to be an exciting game and we expect to be comfortable and play our game. It's going to be exciting out there, but we're still going to be focused and play our game."

Freshman Natalie Achonwa

On rebounding against Texas A&M's quickness

"Texas A&M really focuses on their guards and they are really quick. We are actually going to have to go find them, box out, and then go get the ball, as opposed to standing there trying to out jump them. They are really athletic and very quick and we are going to have to put a body on them and dominate the boards like we always do."

On Texas A&M's pressure defense

"They are really good on defense and put a lot of pressure on you and get up in your face. We are going to have to take care of the ball, be strong with it, and make good passes, dominate passes. We have to be assertive in the post with the decisions we make on any pass or outlet pass because they are going to go for steals and be very quick. We have to take care of the ball."

Inside the paint post play

"They tend to focus on their guard play so I think we can take advantage of their post play a little bit and challenge them to guard us in the post. Our guards do a tremendous job of scoring and attacking so they have to go over and help and it should open us up to finish and score."