



## 2017 NCAA DIVISION I WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

First Round · Arizona State vs. Michigan State

Colonial Life Arena · Columbia, S.C.

Practice Day Quotes – March 16, 2017

### PRACTICE DAY QUOTES – MICHIGAN STATE

#### **Suzy Merchant, Head Coach:**

##### **Opening Statement**

"(We are) excited to be here in the NCAA Tournament, especially here in South Carolina. It's been a very hospitable experience so far, and we're looking forward to playing a tough Arizona State team. I'm appreciative of the fact we're in a city, a town, university that really embraces women's basketball. Looking forward to the atmosphere, so thank you for having us."

##### **On what she expects from Tori Jankoska...**

"I think the one thing that Tori (Jankoska) has learned early on is that she was basically the only scorer that we had and I think that she really put the team on her back. We were young and even though Taya (Reimer) is a transfer and eligibility-wise has some years, she is still new to the system and players that she hasn't played with so really Branndais (Agee) and Tori are the only two kids that have played significant minutes. For us early on, Branndais was hurt and had a pin in her foot. She wasn't quite ready to be a scorer for us and lead. She had to get herself in shape and stronger. We had a lot of injuries in the early season. Jenna Allen and Taya were gone off too so we had a lot of kids who were banged up. I think, early on, we were pretty one-dimensional offensively, and then over time, as Tori mentioned, we started to share the ball really well. We never expected Tori to have to score 35 or 40. We know Tori is a very aggressive, attacking, offensive-minded player but she does a lot for our team besides that. She is one of the best rebounding guards in the country. She is top on our team in assists, she gets to the free throw line, and she does a lot of things to make our team better. I don't expect her to have to score 35 or 40 points, and I don't think you can against Arizona State and the way Charli (Turner Thorne, Arizona State Coach) defends. We have to be able to share the ball and play great team basketball and we know we will have to work for everything, including Tori."

##### **On which Big Ten team she is reminded of when scouting Arizona State...**

"Probably Rutgers, in terms of how they get up in you and deny. Actually, they remind me a lot of how Mississippi State played when we played them in the NCAA Tournament a year ago, in terms of denial and fronting the post, very physical, strong, take charges, always there and ready to help, really handsy, really physical. Maryland is really physical. They do it a different way. Some of the characteristics Arizona State has we played against in the Big Ten but in terms of maybe how they defend, top-to-bottom, and the way they do it, nobody in the Big Ten mirrors that exactly."

### **On the Big Ten being under represented in the NCAA Tournament...**

"I think all the way around, I think the Big Ten had some misrepresentation. I don't know if that's the right word or some struggles in terms of seeding or people getting in. That was disappointing for all of us coaches. It just is. It's not saying anything negative. It's just the reality of it. I think overall, there were just questions too about the tournament. We're here in Columbia and they have to go back out to Stockton again if they advance. That's three years in a row. There's just a lot of things that, I think, trying to fit the puzzle together in the women's game is pretty challenging at times. I think there were a lot of people that were a little bit surprised. Probably the big thing in our league, I was really surprised about Maryland being a No. 3 seed. I think if anything, they win 30 games, they play UConn to six points, they're very good. They have two All-Americans. They've been to Final Fours. They're experienced and have great freshmen at the point. They're deep and strong. That probably surprised me the most of anything."

### **On keys to victory over Arizona State...**

"Well I'm not going to tell you that. Their physicality and inside play and [Sophie] Brunner is as good as they get. That's as a tough minded, competitive person that puts a jersey on at our level in the country. I've been so impressed with her. Her tenacity is unbelievable, and everybody matches it around her. So their size - they have depth. I think the paint is something they really love to attack, whether it be by the dribble or on the inside with their presence with both their bigs. It's going to be tough. Also, they get 40 percent of their offensive rebounds. That's a pretty good rebound percentage. They're a very offensive rebounding team. Keeping them off the boards is going to be a challenge."

### **Tori Jankoska, Senior Guard:**

#### **On how she's improved her offensive game from a year ago...**

"I think it took a lot of growing up mentally and physically over the summer. I was working on my game and picking out my weaknesses from last year. I think that came from both mental and physical sides of the ball. I was getting in the gym, and confidence comes from preparation."

#### **On getting her teammates involved against the Sun Devils...**

"We're one of the top teams in the country in getting assists, and I think that's why it's tough to stop any one of our players on our team. At any moment, Brannndais (Agee) can go and get 30 (points) and Taya (Reimer) can go and get 20 and 10. So we have such a balanced team. If you try and stop one of us, the other players are going to go out and get theirs."

### **Brannndais Agee, R-Junior Guard:**

#### **On how the Spartans plan to defend Arizona State in Friday's opening round...**

"We're a good defending team, and we're also strong offensively. We have some good scorers, but we've been working a lot on our defense these past couple days. I think we're preparing ourselves for that."

### **Taya Reimer, Graduate Student Forward**

#### **On how playing for Notre Dame and her senior leadership helps Michigan State...**

"That's just a thing that I have definitely been trying to focus on, and I think all three of us have good experience in the tournament. We definitely have some young kids that we've been trying to bring along all year. I'm just trying to bring that toughness and that mentality of how you have to be in the tournament."

#### **On Michigan State's plan against Arizona State in Friday's opening round...**

"We know that they're all around a very physical team, so going in we're definitely focusing in on that. They rebound the ball very well, especially offensively. We just need to bring that toughness, especially on the defensive end. We're trying to take away their strengths and limit them to one shot."