

March 30, 2008



An Interview With:

COACH PAT SUMMITT

THE MODERATOR: Congratulations, Coach. Your thoughts on tonight's game.

COACH SUMMITT: Well, actually I thought we opened up the game and just missed a lot of easy shots. I thought we let our offense affect our defense.

I want to give a lot of credit to Notre Dame. I thought that they did a great job, as they did in their first game that we played them, playing off the dribble. I thought that was really part of our game that we were not as committed to.

We didn't force them into the weak end enough, and that may be my fault for not making that a point of emphasis. But I thought at halftime we regrouped and talked about what we had to do and came out and played much better on the defensive end, also just changing up our defense and extending our full court and our three-quarter court. I thought we managed to get them a little bit later in the clock and managed to do a little bit better job with coverage overall out of our match-up defense.

I'm proud of our team overall. Notre Dame played us tough. They obviously -- from the time we played them before until now, they've improved tremendously, and I was very impressed with what I saw and how tough they played us tonight.

We're excited to move on and play in the regional finals. That's exactly where you want to be because the ultimate goal is a Final Four and a National Championship, but you can't do it unless you win that game. So that's going to be a big test for us and obviously against a really tough opponent.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for the student athletes.

Q. Candace, this game kind of felt a little bit like the Oral Roberts game, a little bit maybe of a slow start and then Coach kind of laid the law at the half asking for the defense and intensity to pick up. Just wondering how you felt about that, if that was kind of the case here?

CANDACE PARKER: I felt like in the first half we were just -- like Coach said, letting our offense affect our defense, and we had a slow start, and you can't do that in postseason. I don't know what it is, but we need to fix it.

We regrouped at halftime, and I guess that's why there's two halves in basketball.

Q. Shannon or Candace, either one, talking about that lull that you had in the first half, I never saw anybody panic or even seem concerned like you felt like eventually things were going to come around. Is that how you all felt collectively out there, that this is just a lull and this is going to end quickly, because it did pretty fast, midway through the first half.

CANDACE PARKER: Honestly, this team is full of seniors, and we've been in the same position that we've been in before. North Carolina we were down by 12 with eight minutes to go, so there's no panic. I mean, we just come together and we figure out what's broken and we fix it.

Q. Candace, you had a career high matching 34, plus 13 rebounds, four blocks, three assists, three steals. Is this as good a game as you've played?

CANDACE PARKER: Honestly, I think defensively I did have lapses, and Coach reminded me of those lapses several times. I mean, honestly in postseason you've got to come

through. That's what great players do.

Q. Candace, I saw Coach pull you over, kind of you were sitting there on the bench by yourself at halftime. What did she say to you at that point about the second half?

CANDACE PARKER: Honestly, she just told me that I need to come through on both ends for my team and that I can't let my offense affect my defense and that I need to own the paint and just control the game.

THE MODERATOR: We'll let our student athletes go back to the locker room. We'll take questions for Coach now.

Q. Would you mind talking about what Candace did? Actually she seemed happiest sitting on the bench watching her teammates cut that eight-point lead down to two when she was high-fiving and hip-bumping. She basically was your whole offense in the first half. Is this as good a game as she's played given the circumstances?

COACH SUMMITT: Well, I think this is certainly one of her better games in the paint. Candace is obviously -- she's scored a lot in a lot of different positions, but tonight I really wanted to see her get paint points. I did not feel like she could be stopped unless say they wanted to double-team her.

She did a great job of establishing position and finishing shots. She missed some early, but the good thing is she didn't let that affect her.

When we talked at halftime I thought Candace really took to heart the fact that she could not let her offense affect her defense, and she has to have a great presence for us on defense in order for us to survive and advance.

I think she's the best that she's been defensively, but I think we put so much responsibility on her shoulders offensively that somewhere she's trying to catch a break. So I do understand it. But I just hope we get to the free-throw line and she'll get some rest there.

Q. You haven't talked about it yet, but what will you say to your team about the disruptive type of defense you're getting ready to face in A & M?

COACH SUMMITT: Well, I think Texas A & M, they do a great job of turning it over and they're just relentless on the defensive end. I think we'll have to have a lot of composure. We

definitely have to be aggressive and attack. I haven't seen them in person, so I haven't really talked to my staff to know if we're going to be able to go inside and establish our post game. That's always a priority for us.

But it's our type of schedule that's allowed us to go against a lot of great teams. North Carolina is one of the best aggressive defensive teams, which we faced obviously earlier in the year; LSU, it's not like we haven't seen a lot of great defensive teams. But I think the fact that this A & M team, it looks like to me they just get after it and they'll take chances, and we just have to take care of the basketball so we can be efficient offensively.

Q. Candace said great players have to do this in the postseason. Did you sense that she felt she had to produce more because her teammates weren't early on?

COACH SUMMITT: I just think she knows what her role is on our team. She is our best offensive player. She has the size, she has the skills, she has the mindset to take over a game. You know, as a coach you don't always have that on your basketball team, and when you do have it, you just hope that they have Candace's mentality. She wants it. I mean, she's willing to step up and make the plays for us, and she's obviously talented enough and has the size inside to be able to make the type of plays that obviously you have to have at certain moments.

When we've gone on a long dry spell then we usually run something to Candace.

Other players -- I was pleased with what Nicky Anosike did and just -- I didn't have to tell her to shoot that high shot, and her guard play was not great. And I think we need to get more out of Alexis Hornbuckle, but instead of really settling for the three ball, she's got to play off the dribble. That's when she's at her best.

Q. Can you just talk about the atmosphere tonight, over 10,000 attendance, and the biggest of all the regional semifinals out there this year?

COACH SUMMITT: I do think it speaks volumes to this area and the fact that the people in Oklahoma came out, obviously the Texas A & M fans, there were a lot of Tennessee fans here. It's a type of environment that's good for the game. Obviously for us it was exciting when we walked

out and I saw the amount of people that came to watch our game.

I don't know who promoted that. I'm sure Gary Blair. I've been around him long enough to know he can sell an Eskimo ice. He's quite an interesting guy.

But the fact that they came is good, and I'm sure they had something to do with it and Oklahoma fans just appreciating women's basketball and what the Oklahoma team has meant to this area of the country. And when you have basketball fans, I mean, it's really -- it's good to see that even though the team that they're prepared to root for is not here, they're still supporting women's basketball. That's something that's huge for our game because the men have had that for years, and we're trying to establish that.

Q. Going back to the confidence factor, you guys really seemed to have a lot of that out there today, and I think it showed more when you weren't playing well than when you were playing well. Can you just talk about that, the seniors and the amount of confidence that you all are carrying right now?

COACH SUMMITT: Well, I think we do have great senior leadership. We have obviously a team that is very confident. But also they know when they're not playing well, and our first time-out -- we talked about it, and as time went on there was a greater sense of urgency, and at halftime I thought we really managed to get some important information to them about what we have to do. I don't think they went out there really focused -- with the type of defensive intensity that they should have.

I told them, maybe it's because the first time we played Notre Dame we obviously played very, very well and we were up in that game in a big way early. It's a different game. I told them postseason is entirely different, and you have to be aware of that and you have to answer runs. We did a good job of that in the first half but a lot better in the second half, and I give the senior leadership a lot of credit for how we responded at halftime.

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