

April 5, 2010



An interview with:



THE MODERATOR: I'm pleased to introduce Stanford head coach Tara VanDerveer, as well as student-athletes Rosalyn Gold-Onwude, Jeanette Pohlen, Kayla Pedersen, Nnemkadi Ogumike and Jayne Appel.

COACH VANDERVEER: We're thrilled to be playing in the championship game, and I feel that our team is -- we will be ready. Our team is confident and at this point I think having played the very tough schedule that we played it will really pay off for us. So we'll have a productive day today. Our team has been very focused and get ready for great game tomorrow night.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. I'd like to hear a couple of your favorite Tara stories, dealing with her coaching intensity, coaching skill, whatever. Anybody who has a couple favorite stories, I'd love to hear them.**

JAYNE APPEL: I think it may not come off at first, but how fun she is in practice. We joke around with her all the time. I think my favorite thing to get on her about is her Diet Coke. It's like my mother's coffee in the morning to her. But we love her for it, so...

JEANETTE POHLEN: Even though I've only been here a few years I've had a terrific experience with Tara. She kind of highlighted one

in practice the other day when we were practicing. It was our last practice at Maples and she had one of my favorite quotes. She said -- she said it to Kayla, I think. She said, Kayla, sometimes you're the dog and sometimes you're the hydrant (laughter).

And so I forgot about that one, but she definitely -- she's really great.

KAYLA PEDERSEN: Yeah, I remember her telling me one time -- Jayne and I were both missing layups, but kind of to each other, she's like, It's all right; keep playing Ping-Pong off the backboard. Implying she didn't want us to make the layup. So that was pretty funny.

JEANETTE POHLEN: I think one thing about Tara is she'll be the first one to joke on you in front of everybody. So it's like, you know, some of it is kind of true and stuff, but she keeps joking on you to kind of get her point across so that you're even more embarrassed about something.

KAYLA PEDERSEN: Tara is also kind of a jack-of-all-trades. You always kind of randomly hear about Tara being somewhere or advocating for something. Two examples would be you may not know she was actually in *Cosmopolitan* magazine in an article and she was giving love advice (laughter) for how to catch that male or female athlete of your choice.

And another thing, Tara has been in another magazine as top -- what was it? Best dressed coach? Does anybody remember exactly what it was? She was on Forbes List for best dressed professionals or something. She made it (laughter). It might have been the *New York Times*, she said.

**Q. For any of the players, this is where you wanted to be. Here we are the day before the national championship game. I asked Tara last night, if you think the last couple of games have been a little bit hairy, now that you're here, can you guys just relax and play now that you've gotten to where you wanted to go?**

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: I mean, this is what we've been talking about all year. This is what we've been working for. And I would have to say it's definitely kind of just a little bit of weight lifted off of our shoulders, knowing that we've played as many games as we could possibly play.

And now it's just to leave everything out, everything that we've worked for in the season, just to leave it all out tomorrow night, and I'm really excited that we made it this far, especially with the team that I'm on this year. I don't think it could have been any better.

JEANETTE POHLEN: Yeah, I think there's not as much pressure anymore to get to the national championship game. And we're all really excited to be able to play one more game and go as far as we can in the tournament. That was our ultimate goal. We didn't want to end our season early. We didn't want to end our season early with a loss. So it's exciting to be able to get another shot at UConn. And like Nneka said, put it all out there.

**Q. I'd like to ask each of you, or whoever wants to tackle this, what ways are you different or better as a team than you were when the last time you played Connecticut? Is it better press, better defense? In what ways are you different than the last time you faced Connecticut?**

KAYLA PEDERSEN: I think we're playing more consistently throughout each half. I think that we now understand how to attack pressure, and the value of every possession now. We don't want any empty possessions. We want to capitalize on everything that they do. And I think we're more fresh. So I think we're just kind of rejuvenated and just ready to go.

ROSALYN GOLD-ONWUDE: I think at this point of the season it's not only the players that are better equipped to handle UConn, but our coaches as well. I think scouting at that point, there were so few games coming into it, UConn hadn't really sculpted their idea. They had question marks, too, and both of us were coming into it undefeated. I think now, after watching other people play, we can figure out what will make us successful.

**Q. Jayne?**

JAYNE APPEL: I kind of agree with both of them. I think it really will help us having only played one game in the past week and not three. I also think that it will be different in the sense we've

really learned. We watched our worst moments in basketball. That's what we focused on. We watched our highlights after the game, then after that we pick apart everything we did wrong from physically to mentally.

And that goes from player 1 to player 15. So I think that as a team as a whole we've just really learned from our mistakes and hopefully we'll be able to continue to improve on them in tomorrow's game.

**Q. For any of the players, kind of building on that last question. Tara mentioned about how confident the team feels now. How much of is that based on the fact that you played Connecticut in December and played them very competitively and you have that body of work taking into this game tomorrow?**

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: Are you talking about confidence in tomorrow?

**Q. Yeah.**

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: Well, I mean, it's always good to be able to play a team before you play them just to know their tendencies and what they like to do. I wouldn't say that -- I mean, I guess statistically and scout-wise speaking, we are confident in the fact that we've played them. But I think most of our confidence comes from what we've learned over the course of the game since then, whether it be on or off the court.

We've definitely been put into several different -- I think we've been put into almost every situation possible in a game. And I'm glad that we have that experience. And when it comes to crunch time, we really know what to do.

But I think the confidence right now lies within us. And kind of the dynamics of us as teammates kind of as a sisterhood together, that's kind of lighting the fire and pushing everybody to their limit.

**Q. I'd like to address this to Jeanette and Ros. None of the teams shot the 3-point well last night. I think it's 16 percent for all four teams. I wonder, could you all talk about the dome, the impact, the different way it looks, was it maybe the situation? And how big do you think 3-point shooting might be in the matchup tomorrow night? Connecticut didn't shoot the 3 well either. Both the 3-point shooting and perimeter scoring for both teams**

tomorrow?

ROSALYN GOLD-ONWUDE: I actually didn't even consider the dome as a factor. I actually felt in shoot-around that all the guards were shooting pretty well.

Personally -- I get this from my mom; I'm a little weird and superstitious sometimes, the weird stuff -- sometimes I think there's a certain number of made 3s out there and if you used them all last night they wouldn't happen tomorrow. So we didn't use them. So I feel like maybe they'll all be put to use tomorrow. And I feel like for a lot of our teammates 3s are contagious. I know for me, and I'm not sure about Jeanette, but you hit one and it really opens up the basket.

JEANETTE POHLEN: Yeah. And I don't really think any four of the teams that played last night are exactly known for 3-point shooting. Most of the teams have somebody inside or somebody that can drive and are really looking to get the ball inside, and so I think that's one of the reasons why we came out on top as far as the win, and UConn as well, because even if we're having a bad shooting night, we can really score inside and dominate.

**Q. Jayne, you said you go over the things that you've done poorly in a game. With that in mind, Connecticut's the only game you lost this year; how much have you reviewed that game, referenced it, when trying to figure out things you shouldn't do as a team the rest of the season? Have you watched the tape again since December? And if all of you can talk about that, that would be great.**

JAYNE APPEL: We watched it this morning I think for the first time kind of since the game really cut up and focusing on them, and so I think we've kind of -- although we haven't looked ahead, we've been working ahead. So I think we'll be ready to come out and compete tomorrow night and really capitalize on what we kind of had lapses in the last game with them.

**Q. (Question off microphone)?**

JAYNE APPEL: I think we saw a certain number of plays, in specifically the second half, where we kind of just assumed they were going to make some of the layups or didn't box out and not gave up on the play but weren't fully into the play.

And they capitalized on a lot of those missed layups. They were right there for the offensive rebounds, and there were a few loose balls that they got. So those are all things that we

can fix. And that's where it comes down to effort, and we know that we can really show that we can make a better effort.

**Q. It's been described as Connecticut's dominated for two years. They have that long streak. It's been described as UConn and everybody else. You have a history with them. You're the last team that have beaten them. How bad are you itchin' to play them again?**

ROSALYN GOLD-ONWUDE: I was talking with family friends and someone actually said to me, you know, when the game got close between Baylor and UConn, I kind of wanted to see UConn win because I wanted you guys to face them and have the chance to avenge that loss and also say that if you did win, it was against what people are calling now maybe one of the most dominant UConn teams ever.

And I think it's fitting and exciting that we're going to see them again. And I really don't know what else to say besides that. Like I'm ready to go out. Whoever ended up winning, I'm ready to see.

**Q. Nneka, could you talk about what Ros was referring to, that moment when Baylor got within 3. Did you learn something about Connecticut and the way they responded? Because it seemed like it was the first time in this tournament they had been challenged. And could you also speak to the impact that Maya Moore had. She described your game having watched it as having been a terrific impact, but can you just comment on that?**

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: Well, I mean, first of all, Maya Moore is a phenomenal player and athlete. And I was grateful that she complimented me. The least I can do is compliment her. She's a huge asset for their team.

But in regards to how UConn responded to I guess the closeness of the game, when Baylor got them, I think it was within 3, I mean, they stayed composed and they took care of the ball and kind of reflected how we handled yesterday's game even.

I think when good teams get into situations like that, they know not to panic. And, quite frankly, I think that's something that we both kind of shared with UConn. And I think they handled themselves very well. They didn't panic. They didn't start throwing the ball away.

But I'd also have to give credit to Baylor for

giving them somewhat of a game in the beginning of the second half. Baylor is a talented team and everyone is going to want to play you their hardest. Oklahoma showed us that yesterday. And so kudos to those teams as well.

**Q. Jayne, how well do you know Tina Charles? Can you sort of assess the matchup tomorrow? And what do you see as her strengths?**

JAYNE APPEL: I know her very well. She's one of my great basketball friends. And I think that competing against her from the age of 11 on, you know, I think one of her greatest strengths is running from rim to rim. She really likes to do her work early and get you in as deep as she can inside the key. I think those are some of the greatest things about her game.

**Q. Nneka, a lot of focus tomorrow night, obviously, is going to be on the matchup between you and Maya. Could you address that and what you expect of it in light of the performances you both had in the national semifinals?**

NNEMKADI OGWUMIKE: Like I said, Maya is a good player. We both have really good teams. I think it's going to be a matchup not just individually but collectively, just the disparity between teamwork and working hard and going after each possession.

I think it's going to be a battle that's going to show the fight to the finish between everybody. And, I mean, Connecticut doesn't just have Maya Moore; they have Tina Charles, they have Kalana Greene, Caroline Doty, Tiffany Hayes.

And then we don't just have one player; we have all these people up here, and then some on the bench as well. And I think it's going to be really great matchup. I'm really excited.

**Q. Ros, this is for you. In your estimation, what is it going to take to win tomorrow night?**

ROSALYN GOLD-ONWUDE: I think it always starts for us with a great scouting game plan. I think that we are going to need a traditionally good game, like that we always expect from our big three. Maybe an exceptionally good game.

I think that our guards are going to have to do their part. We can't turn the ball over. We have to box out. And we have to get back in transition, especially on Maya, because she's really running

hard in transition. And stay with it, try to avoid their big runs and help each other out.

**Q. Two years ago you guys lost to UConn early in the season in a tournament and you came back and beat them in the semifinals. Does this dynamic feel familiar at all for you?**

JAYNE APPEL: I think, you know, even in the Pac-10 it's hard to play a team twice in the year for both teams. You know their tendencies, you know what they traditionally come out and do against you.

But I think we're excited. We've been in this position before of playing for national championship. We've been in the position of going home before a national championship.

So I think we're just going to take all of the energy, bundle it up into our game plan, and come out and just try to compete for 40 minutes.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Questions for Coach.

**Q. Tara, when you watched the film this morning, what was more instructive: The 15-2 run that you guys went on in the first half or the 30-to-6 run they went on in the second half?**

COACH VANDERVEER: Well, I've watched the game several times. And, you know, I think that for us, obviously, we want to know that we can make the run when we're down; that we're capable of beating a team in 20 minutes.

At the same time, the second half, the game got away from us. And I think it's just really important for our team to see how it got away from us.

So I would say that we've probably focused more on how it got away from us this morning, just to say: Look at the things we could have done. Look at the things we need to do. Look at the things we're capable of doing.

We didn't do those in December. We have to do those in April.

**Q. What didn't you do?**

COACH VANDERVEER: Well, I think that, first of all, for our team, and as you can hear kind of these players talk about it, they really do well when there's a very clear plan for them, and then people follow a plan.

It really is very helpful for us to have played Connecticut and see our matchups, see how people guard different people, what they do

against us.

And so for our team, a clear plan -- and I don't know that we had a clear plan. And part of it was the fact that we had played a lot of big games leading up to Connecticut.

And this is tough, too, when we only have one day. We like it when we have like maybe three or four days and we can go over things, and we spend a lot of time watching video almost ad nauseam. Our team is like -- we joke about it. I'll be like: Does anybody want to watch video? And they've seen enough.

A lot of the mistakes we made were how we played screens. A lot of the things, just our help side. Our not boxing out. Quite honestly, we were not aggressive enough. And I think that part of it could be the fact that we weren't as energetic as we needed to be.

We were a little tired. And also at this point I think we had more bodies. We can play Joslyn. She was just coming off a stress fracture.

So being more energetic, being more aggressive, and learning from the mistakes that we made, I think, will be key.

**Q. Obviously both teams are filled with some very talented players. But a little unique situation in that each side has one who has the ability to take over a game, as they showed last night. Could you talk about that dynamic of having Nneka and Maya with that type of player on the floor?**

COACH VANDERVEER: Well, Nneka had a great game last night, and she is really stepping up for us. Maya Moore is just -- she's a tough guard for anyone in that she's so big, so strong. And she shot the ball probably the best of any shooter last night, all four teams combined.

She's the best player in the game right now in the college game, and she's better than a lot of the professionals, too.

But we can't have it be a one-on-one match. It can't be Maya Moore versus one person for us. We have to really help on her. And not only do they have her, but they have the second best player in Tina Charles. And obviously both of them did a lot of damage last night. And we just have to really work hard to limit their damage, and then maximize the strengths that we have. We're going to need Jayne to give us more. Kayla to give us more.

We can't expect Nneka to carry us with another 40-point game.

**Q. You played them when they came along in '95, you've played them various times in their development --**

COACH VANDERVEER: You didn't have to bring that up, Mel.

**Q. I'm not talking about the wins or losses; just playing them. Talk about their development over the years, what they do better now than maybe they did back then, maybe they did something a little better then that they don't do now?**

COACH VANDERVEER: You all are very familiar with Geno, his program, and this particular team. Geno does a great job. He's a superb teacher of the game. He has a vision for how his team will play. And they play that way or they don't play.

They are very talented players, individually, but collectively they're more formidable, because they play so well together. And they're very physical. I think that what I've seen with them is that their defense has really improved. I mean, they've always been just a beautiful offensive kind of machine to watch, how they pass and screen, and they're one of the best passing teams, I mean, just traditionally.

And they're an excellent shooting team. But their defense is what's working for them now. They create a lot of turnovers. Like we turned it over like 17 times against them last time we played. They are extremely athletic and fast. And you can't -- you can't shoot yourself in the foot with them.

You've got to really value the possession of the ball. You can't give them second shots. You've got to limit the good looks that they get. And even if you're right there on them, they still can make shots.

**Q. You've got inside players, and you go there first offensively, but do you have to knock down shots from the outside tomorrow night to win?**

COACH VANDERVEER: Last time we played them, we didn't shoot extremely well. We were like 5-for-13. But JJ and Kayla and Jeanette all made 3s. I don't think we can expect to win if we're bricklayers.

But, you know what, they didn't shoot that well the first time we played them. They were 3-for-20 from 3. And last night I don't think they

shot that well. I don't know what they shot from the perimeter last night. But everyone just seemed to struggle.

But we have really good shooters on our team. And if people focus on inside with Jayne or with Nneka, that will be a time people are going to have to read the defense and knock down perimeter shots.

**Q. You've done something probably no other coach has done: You won two championships in three years. You win an Olympic gold medal. And then some of your teams struggle or weren't as successful as the other teams. Now all of a sudden you're back, third straight year in the Final Four. Psychologically, what was that like? What was it like to win two championships, a gold medal, and see this Connecticut phenomenon sort of blossom, and then you're able to come back and beat that phenomenon and play them again?**

COACH VANDERVEER: You know, well, I think a lot of it has to do with the players that you have. Recruiting great players and having, for us -- if you look at maybe different years, for us we could tie it to -- we could look at not just the coach and the program, but who our dean of admissions is. We can look at kind of just the injuries that we've had. And it was very hard.

It wasn't like that we were horrible. But once you get used to the cream, it's hard to be down in that skim milk. It was really -- we wondered if we could really ever get back. And I think we knocked down the door three times in a row with Elite Eight. So we kind of said we're there.

And then I think really the person that -- key players like Maya Moore for Connecticut or Tina Charles for them, because they had a little bit of a lull, by their standards, but we really got back on track with Candice and Jayne. Candice Wiggins, you know, really just has a passion and she was just such a charismatic player for us, and Jayne, the inside presence.

Then along comes Nneka, and obviously Kayla and just having the players. And then once you're knocking on the door, then you expect this. Our team expected to come to the Final Four and expected to be in this game. And now we need our team to expect to win.

**Q. Along those lines, to segue out of what you just said, I think among casual fans,**



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**there's probably this inevitability that Connecticut's already been crowned and you're going to -- you're playing for the Cinderella role tomorrow. How do you respond to that as far as what the casual fan sees? And also is there a motivation in your locker room because they've already been crowned in a lot of people's minds?**

COACH VANDERVEER: You know, I mean, sometimes I think that like with our team, we just try to take it one step at a time. And our kids, one day I think they had heard something on television or read something. They said, yeah, it's the NCAA tournament, the Connecticut Invitational. They were kind of just like a little -- just kind of talking about that.

I said, hey, so let's get invited. And let's get here and let's just take it one step at a time. And Connecticut has earned their -- the accolades that they get. I mean, to go 77 games, that's incredible. That's just -- I think that's tremendous.

But what I try to do -- even during the year people will say: How about you and Connecticut? And I'm like: We're not there yet. But now we can talk about it. And our team has earned kind of the opportunity to talk about playing Connecticut. And we are playing them.

We did not play that well the first time around. We did well in the first half. We went into Hartford, which I think is a tough place to play. We were up at halftime. And then the game got away from us.

And our team needs to -- we need to say, hey, we have to have the confidence to know for one half we can win. We have to put two halves together.

Whatever everyone thinks out there, you know, just like I think everyone had maybe crowned the Patriots as NFL champions. Well, the Giants won.

So we just have to come out and play. We have to play a lot better than actually we're playing right now, and we might need Connecticut to have a little off night.

**Q. The other big matchup tomorrow is going to be Jayne Appel against Tina Charles. How concerned are you that Jayne is not in top condition at this point, and that she's still a little gimpy from her ankle and has been for a month?**

COACH VANDERVEER: Right.

**Q. And a follow-up, if I may. How would you like this game to be officiated? Would you prefer that the refs let a little of the physicality go? Or would you like it called very tightly?**

COACH VANDERVEER: Let me start with the officiating. Of course, which I have no control over. I think they should call it the way they've been calling it all year. They make a point of emphasis not to allow rough post play. And last night I thought Jayne was -- I just thought it was a very physical game.

I just think if you have people going to the basket and people impede their progress or they're bumping them and pushing them and it's -- I don't think it's good for the women's game. And I've always felt that way. I don't want it really tight. I don't want ticky-tack trials. I think people are coming to watch the best players, and we want them to play.

But I don't think it should be a wrestling match or we shouldn't be looking at like an NFL offensive linemen drill.

The other question about Jayne is she's an absolute warrior. She is in pain. She does not practice. She feels that her wind is good getting up and down, but she is clearly not the All-American player that was playing that way for us a month ago.

And all we can ask her to do is to battle in there and do the very best that she can, which I feel like she is. But I want her to get deep in and score and make really good decisions about her passing. She rebounded well last night. I thought she ran pretty well for us.

But there's a couple times where she just is off balance and not finishing the way I've seen her for four years. She's really key for our team's success. And I think the fact that this is her last game and this is a person that she's played against since she was 11 years old, I think you'll see Jayne give it her all, what she's capable of.

But her ankle is holding her back. She won't tell you that, but I can see it.

**Q. I want to get back to the film of the first game. You mentioned a while ago that you had watched it several times. Does it get to the point with Connecticut, because of the possibility down the road of playing them in the Final Four, where it becomes sort of like something you carry around with you and just**

**pop it in the machine, when you have an hour, hour and a half to kill?**

COACH VANDERVEER: Not necessarily. I kind of feel like I have it a little memorized. I've watched it early when we went back. I mean, I can go through and clip it so I have clips of it. Looking at like the stat sheet.

But you kind of have to get away from that, when you have December. We can't keep bringing that to our team. It's about -- for us it's about our journey. For us it's about getting better.

And I'm thankful that we scheduled Connecticut and Tennessee and Duke, because I feel like -- and Gonzaga -- all these teams in different ways have helped us get better.

And Connecticut has helped us get better. But for our team, it's -- sometimes we just want to show them and say here's what has given us problems. Here's what we need to do better. Here's -- to play at the elite level, this is what you have to be able to do.

But I don't think it's healthy for us or for our team to constantly be putting it in their face. I mean, I think it's tedious watching some of the games and listening to some of the announcers just go on about how Connecticut never takes a play off. I mean, they're kids. They're college students, like our college students, and no one plays a perfect game.

And that's what for our team is that we want to learn from the mistakes we made, but also recognize, you know, you went into Hartford and you were up at halftime. You did a lot of good things but not enough good things.

**Q. A lot is made in basketball about the relationship between the coach and a point guard. They're often said they're an extension of the coach on the floor. Conversely, could you talk about the relationship between the coach and a post player, center? And to sort of follow that up, is it more difficult to get maximum out of post players than perhaps perimeter players?**

COACH VANDERVEER: You know, I think sometimes it's just different personalities and different people click. What I try to do is -- as an example with Jayne. Jayne is the closest probably on our staff -- she gets along well with all of our coaches, but closest to Amy. Amy works with Jayne and really is Jayne's kind of confidante.

But I might be -- I speak with Jayne before

every game. We step outside of the locker room and I just remind Jayne how much I enjoy coaching her and what a tremendous talent she is and how much she means to our team. And I just remind her to stay out of foul trouble. But I feel like it's more -- it's not positional, but more just personality.

I thought you were going to ask me about Jeanette. I'm just getting to know Jeanette. But if there's someone on the team -- I feel like I have -- maybe I can just relate to Nneka really well. We're the oldest. We're the oldest of four girls. So some of it is just based maybe on family or personality, recruiting who you get to know. Not positional, in my mind.

**Q. You were talking about your scheduling and I guess I'd like to know if you and Geno have had any discussions even preliminarily about extending your regular season series beyond next year's game in Palo Alto. And do you think it would be good for women's basketball if you and Connecticut played every year?**

COACH VANDERVEER: I know that we have. I think Neal Eskin does the scheduling, and we are working on that. And I hope that we are able to continue it.

I think it's really good for us. I don't know if it's good for women's basketball. But I think you have the East Coast/West Coast, and Geno does just a great job with their team and program. They have outstanding fans.

And I know that it will be a big game when Connecticut comes to Stanford next year.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about your early days in basketball. Where exactly did you grow up in Upstate New York? And I read a story in the Mercury News last week that your father didn't want you to play basketball and you said: Algebra won't get me anywhere, either.**

COACH VANDERVEER: Right.

**Q. I read another story that you would bow out in your Delta '88 to go watch Immaculata play?**

COACH VANDERVEER: That's true.

I grew up in Schenectady, New York, since I was from five to 15. At the time I was growing up there wasn't basketball for girls. I would go out and play with the boys. I grew up in a really nice like 80 home kind of neighborhood where all the dads worked at General Electric outside of

Schenectady. And it was a *Leave It to Beaver* kind of childhood.

I would go out to play, but as I got older the boys then didn't want girls playing, so then I liked to have the best basketball; if they wanted to use that ball, then I got to play. And I played all the time. If the boys weren't there, I would just shoot by myself. And by the time I got to be about -- I know my parents were just like -- they were both teachers. They would say: Come in and do your algebra homework, study, because basketball is not going to take you anywhere.

So I would send them postcards like from Russia, you know, P.S.: Basketball is what's paying my way over here.

But as a young child, it was very hard, actually, because of not having teams that I decided when my parents moved -- we moved to Niagara Falls, New York -- I was done with basketball. In fact, I'm kind of stubborn.

I moved as a sophomore in high school. I hated where we moved. I hated leaving my school. I was kind of bratty as a 15-year-old. Maybe an adolescent. So we moved in November. My parents finally broke down. I never had a hoop of my own. And they were getting me a hoop for Christmas. And I was like: I'm done with basketball. I'll never shoot on that hoop.

My dad put it up and other kids played on it, but I didn't play on it. I decided to try out for cheerleading. It was a love/hate relationship with basketball. Because I loved it, but there were no opportunities to play.

So I just started watching. I watched Calvin Murphy at Niagara and St. Bonaventure had Bob Lanier. And I watched it and studied it in my own little way. I went to Indiana and -- I started at Albany because I went back to where I had gone to high school, and then I just said basketball is no fun here.

I jumped center, leading scorer, leading rebounder leading turnover. So I got friends and drove out watched the tournament and I said I want to play in kind of the big time of AIW basketball and went to Indiana and had a great experience there.

**Q. So you didn't play on a high school --**

COACH VANDERVEER: Never. No, never played high school. My college season was a seven-game regular season schedule. I

sprained my ankle, missed half the season. But I had great friends -- and I played -- I would go to the gym -- like I studied and went to class, and then I would go to the gym all afternoon. We practiced after the boys, which was at 7:00 at night. So that was -- I would go watch Bobby Knight's practice for like three hours.

**Q. How important is it for you guys to get off to a big start or a good start tomorrow night? When you played them last year in the semis they kind of blitzed you from the start, whereas in December you had a great first half --**

COACH VANDERVEER: I think that was really key for us. I like when we get out to a good start in any game. We have started well with the exception of, I would say, maybe our Arizona State game at home and our Arizona game.

I think this team -- we've got to stay in contact with them. We're not like a super athletic pressing, trapping, okay, we can get down and we can come back from whatever, being down 15 or something.

So we did get down nine and we did come back. We rallied. But I think we have to come out and each possession, I mean, has to be a heavyweight fight. You gotta stay up. You can't get on the mat.

**Q. Take a little detour, Tara. Geno is going to be the Olympic coach. The first time since '96 on your turn that a collegiate coach is running the Olympic team. If you look at histories, Pat, K, and you, in your own programs, if you're looking at time lines, you all had dips around the same time you were coaching the Olympians. Are there things he needs to be on guard against, on guard for in terms of his own program as he moves in that direction in the next couple of years?**

COACH VANDERVEER: Well, he'll do a great job with the Olympic team. I think it is maybe a little bit different. For me I had to take the whole year off, so my situation was maybe different than anyone's.

I don't know that it's anything that you just -- you get -- you just get so tired. Like for me I just was -- you just don't have the same amount of energy. So I think it's having people around you who will do a lot of the stuff for you that -- I mean, you just need other people working a lot harder around you, because you just get worn down.

I was just so physically tired and emotionally drained from the experience. And I just didn't realize it until even in the middle of the year and I just didn't have the same kind of bounce to my step and enthusiasm that you need to have to work with collegiate student-athletes.

**Q. Tara, you were asked about how important it is to get off to an early start. I'm kind of wondering, from looking at it from the other end of the game, you had a couple of games where things got really tense for you down the stretch with Xavier, and obviously last night as well. Do you wonder what the same emotions might be for Connecticut; they've been behind in only like 38 minutes this year. Do you wonder what it might be like? Obviously you want to put them in that situation, but do you wonder what it would be like for them to finally be in a real tense game down the stretch?**

COACH VANDERVEER: You know, obviously we'd like to put them in that situation. We'd like it to not even be that tense. We like to have that 10-, 15-, 18-point lead. But obviously look at what happened last night.

I think for us -- Connecticut even last night was a little test for them. They're human. They shoot air balls like we shoot air balls. They miss free throws or they miss shots or they miss box-outs, and for our team I think it's just going to come down to us being really physical, us not backing down, making -- people making shots. Making sure we don't give them easy shots. Make it hard for them.

And I'm sure they're going to try to do the same thing to us, not letting people be in their comfort zone. But I think that they have -- they've won before. Even though maybe the games haven't been that close, I know they do drills in practice. They play against guys and played down 10 and come back and things like that.

I just think that we have to focus on what we do and we have to do it really, really well. And just see how -- we have to battle. And I just hope that we come out and do that.

**Q. Reflecting back on '96, as it turned out it was a very important moment for the growth of women's sports. And you won the gold medal, softball won the gold medal. Soccer won the gold medal. Maybe one of the**

**most celebrative moments for women sports at that point. Could you talk about how that sort of maybe changed the game for women and the way they were perceived in many ways?**

COACH VANDERVEER: One of the things I think was that brought to my attention, I mean, this was kind of funny was Sheryl Swoopes as an example, when Sheryl Swoopes was first on the team, we trained for a year, she could bench-press 40 pounds.

It was by the end of the year, I mean, it was more. I can't tell you exactly what it was. But Lisa Leslie said to me: I'm proud of my muscles. You saw women with strong arms and physical in a very positive way. And they were proud of -- Lisa was excited to be fit and strong.

Some of the training was intense for a year. I think it was -- it was really a little bit of the foundation for the profession of women's basketball. And seeing women not only as collegiate athletes but as professional athletes, and for me it was just a tremendous year working with really dedicated and committed women athletes and traveling the world.

And I think it was a big statement, not just by our sport, but by the other female athletes at the Atlanta Olympics.

**Q. Last night UConn had for one of the rare times during their streak, the role players -- not Maya and Tina -- have an off night; I think they combined for 15 points, the rest of the team. Does that help you guys get confidence that that blueprint may work; that if they get in foul trouble and they're not shooting well they can be in a little bit of trouble? Or is it, okay, they have this off night finally and the odds of that happening two days in a row or two games in a row is not too high for them?**

COACH VANDERVEER: Well, the numbers, I think, would show that Connecticut -- I mean, Connecticut's best players are Maya Moore and Tina Charles and they stepped up for them. And what do they score? Like 56 or 58 of their 70 points.

You know, so they didn't need the other players. But I think that the key players for their team are Maya Moore, Tina Charles, maybe Kalana Greene being in there. But the other kids are great players. Hayes. Caroline Doty. They can have a night off and their team can still be really successful.

You have to, people say, pick your poison. They have a lot of weapons. And I don't know that

that gives me any comfort to say, well, okay, let's count on that. I mean, they're all very, very capable of players. So maybe they buy into Ros's mother theory: They're going to get a certain number of 3s and they just didn't happen. So that could be bad news for us.

**Q. That seven-game season, was that Albany or Indiana?**

COACH VANDERVEER: It might have been nine games at Indiana. Seven or nine, I can't remember which it was.

**Q. Which place did you sprain your ankle?**

COACH VANDERVEER: Indiana.

**Q. And when you played outside, were you playing at a playground in Schenectady?**

COACH VANDERVEER: No. Driveways. I didn't have a playground. Families had their house and a hoop on the garage. And my next-door neighbor had one, and sometimes they'd park the car there so that I knew that wasn't available so I'd go to the other one. Then there was another one that had a nice half court that was out in a little bit of a field. So I kind of took over that one.

**Q. Do you remember Riley? Was he a big --**

COACH VANDERVEER: He was a little older than me. He went to a different high school. But, yes, boys basketball was big in the Schenectady area.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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