

April 5, 2010



An interview with:



THE MODERATOR: It is my pleasure to welcome to the podium Connecticut head coach Geno Auriemma, as well as student-athletes Kalana Greene, Caroline Doty, Tiffany Hayes Tina Charles, and Maya Moore.

Coach, when you're ready.

COACH AURIEMMA: Hard to imagine that we're back here now 364 days from last season. It seems like just yesterday that we were playing and winning a national championship. And what's gone into coming back here has been so incredible and so amazing, what these particular kids have been through and what we've done and how we've done it.

I think it's right and it's just that we're playing tomorrow night. No one's guaranteed to win tomorrow night. Stanford doesn't deserve to win, Coach Auriemma and his players and Connecticut don't deserve to win, but I think both teams deserve to be playing tomorrow night.

I know I speak for everybody else that we're pretty excited about playing tomorrow night.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Kalana, your experience playing Stanford for the first time, what do you guys get from that experience and what do you apply tomorrow night?

KALANA GREENE: I think the first time we played Stanford we knew it was going to be tough. And you have a lot of weapons. I think it's

going to be the same thing tomorrow night. We just have to grind it out and fight hard and pay attention to the scouting report and do everything we've been doing the entire year to try to get the win.

Q. Yesterday was a pretty physical and intense game. I want to know how your bodies are today. Do you feel more tired than normal? Business as usual? Or did yesterday take a little bit more out of you than normal?

MAYA MOORE: Yeah, it was definitely a physical game, as it should be. And I think both teams came out of it feeling like they exerted a lot of energy. But I think one of the benefits of our schedule this season is we had a lot of -- a couple of Saturday-Monday games. So I think our bodies know how to react, and we know how to kind of take care of ourselves in that quick turnaround and take the necessary treatments we need. So that won't be an excuse tomorrow.

TINA CHARLES: I would just say I think that's just the best part of this whole thing; that at the end of the year you have to see which team is just going to fight through everything, fight through all of the excuses as to why maybe we couldn't play hard.

But I think at the end of the day, when it all comes together, either team, whoever wins the national championship, I think that's why you get happy, because you fought through all the little things.

Q. Caroline and Kalana, I think the two teams shot something like 4 for 32 from 3s yesterday. And your first games, not good outside shooting. Is there a reason for that? And how big a part do you think the perimeter scoring is going to play tomorrow?

KALANA GREENE: I think with our team we don't really rely on just outside shooting or rely just on the inside game. I think we have a good balance.

So when we're not hitting a lot of outside shots -- I mean, it's nice to hit them but when we're not hitting them, we find other ways, whether it's in transition or forcing turnovers and Tina working down low.

So I think for us we always find a way to score, even if we're shooting well or not.

CAROLINE DOTY: I agree with Kalana. Shots aren't going to fall. You're going to have nights where shots aren't going to fall, and we're going to rely on our defense and transition game and trying to work the ball around and trying to get baskets different ways. We've been working on our shots. Putting up plenty of baskets the last couple of days. We feel confident with it. It will come.

Q. Tiffany and Caroline, it was a rough shooting night yesterday, I think 1 for 14 combined. Can you talk about rebounding from that and what's it going to take to make sure you have more contributions in the championship game?

CAROLINE DOTY: You can't dwell on it. You just gotta know -- you know what shots are open and when to take them, and if you think about it, then you're never going to get out of that little slump. But it's a new game, new day, and we're going to keep shooting and taking what the defense gives us.

Q. Tina, two years ago you guys played Stanford early in the season in the tournament, then they came back and beat you in the semifinals in that second game of the season. You guys are in a bit of the same spot this year. What is the difference this year in this situation in your mind?

TINA CHARLES: Different players. Players improved. I know me personally, I improved my style of play. I'm not the same player that I was two years ago. We got new faces. Everybody's on the same page. And we all have one goal.

Q. Maya, Tina, you've all had opportunities to play with the Stanford players on international teams for a few years. When you're in that environment as teammates, do you ever think about the days when you're going to have to play them for school in terms of not showing off too much or giving them an inside look as to what you can do or what you like to do? Do you ever think about that? I

mean, when you're with Nneka or with Jayne about showing them too much about what your skill level is or what your strengths are?

TINA CHARLES: I think that's the best part, because then you get to see if you can stop that. I take pride in if I'm able to block one of Jayne's shots or if I'm able to rotate right on defense and just try to stop their move. And I think that's the best part of seeing what they can do, because you're able to see what you are made of on the defensive side.

MAYA MOORE: I don't change my game at all. We all put aside our college differences for a little while when we're playing together. And you're just competing. You're not thinking about the college season, necessarily. We're always competitive and stuff like that. But I don't think we hold back, if that's what you're asking.

Q. Tina, can you talk a little bit about the matchup with Jayne Appel and how that will be different than your matchup with Brittney Griner. What exactly are you going to have to do against Jayne in this game?

TINA CHARLES: Just I know it's going to be a battle, just physically on both of our ends. Just having my hands up on defense. Just trying to stop her from going to the middle. She can use both of her hands real well. Just those intangibles that a post player has.

Q. Maya, I wonder if you could tell me, when you look at Nneka, watch her play, what you see, describe her as a basketball player?

MAYA MOORE: She's very aggressive. I think she's playing with a lot of confidence right now. She can do a lot of things on the basketball court. She knows what she's good at. She knows her strengths and she goes to them. Very athletic. She can rebound. She can score for them. She runs the floor. And is very active.

I think she -- if she puts her mind to it, it is absolutely a leader for that team, just as far as what she can physically do on the basketball court.

Q. Maya and Tina, have you had a chance to think about what's before you, the history you may be about to make going back to back undefeated national champions?

TINA CHARLES: No, I don't think that will come into play, only if everything goes well. Right now we're focusing in on Stanford and what we

have to do to win a national championship, all those little things will come afterwards.

MAYA MOORE: That's not something we're focusing on right now. If you get too ahead of yourself or start taking your eyes off what's right in front of us, that's when you get beat.

So right now we're looking forward to tomorrow and preparing for that and going through our daily routine and keeping our same schedule and going out and having fun tomorrow.

Q. Kalana and Tina, you guys knew this day was coming, obviously. You're seniors and this is going to be it. But I'm wondering what you both think about doing everything for the last time -- last practice, last shoot-around, last game -- what tomorrow's going to be like for you knowing that one way or another you move on in life after tomorrow?

KALANA GREENE: We're in the position that every senior that plays college basketball wants to be in. We tried our best to get ourselves in this position and in the right way, and I think it's up to our team to get the win for us tomorrow.

But I think we're just going to try to focus everyone up because these are the last couple of moments as a team. And we're enjoying it. I know I am. I'm pretty sure Tina is, and, like I said, this is the position we wanted to be in ever since last year.

Q. Maya, I know the coaching staff's really good at breaking down tape and making you guys look like you lost the game by 50 points after you played them. What did you guys -- after you watched the Stanford tape from before, assuming you have, what did you take from that game; what do you guys look to improve on?

MAYA MOORE: I know we didn't come out the way we wanted to in that first half. Just not really on the same page. We're one of those teams, one of the positive things we can take from it is we're always looking for that next run. And we always have to have confidence that another run is coming, that's what we ended up doing in the first half of that game. So we're definitely going to study it some more.

But always be confident, I think, in knowing that our team is about to be on another run.

Q. Maya, maybe a follow-up on that. Yesterday when Baylor pulled within 3, we saw how you responded to that. Coach Auriemma

remarked yesterday how it was good for everyone to see that you guys responded in that way. When you were down at the half against Stanford and you're sitting in that locker room, could you take us back and what did you see in your teammates' eyes that made you believe that the next run was coming?

MAYA MOORE: You know, we weren't satisfied at all with how we were playing. We knew we hadn't played our best basketball at all. So I don't think there was ever a doubt in our minds that we could win. It was just a matter of putting it together and really locking in and focusing on the things that we needed to do at the time to get it back.

So it's kind of unfortunate that people on the outside don't get to sometimes watch our practices, because we're put in those tough situations all the time by Coach Auriemma where we have to fight back and battle. By the time the game's come, we feel super confident and really prepared to combat anything that the other team throws at us.

Q. Kalana, do you have a favorite Geno story? And after five years, you've seen him now for five years, what do you think it is about him that has made him a coach that has won six and now potentially seven national championships?

KALANA GREENE: He's never complacent. He's never satisfied. He's a competitor. A lot of people may pat us on the back and say that was good, and he looks at us and says that's not good enough. He's always looking for the perfect game.

And he knows it's impossible to become perfect. But every day he strives towards that. So seeing that every day and everybody thinks you look at the big picture but he looks at all the small things that make the big picture. And that's what I think makes him so successful in his profession.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Questions for Coach.

Q. Geno, if you go back to '95, it didn't seem like you and Tara had the warmest relationship then; there were different things that happened and Nykesha Sales' remark and everything. But over the years she's spoken very appreciatively about the way you coach, your style; you've said the same thing. Could

you talk about the evolution of your relationship and also the fact she was an Olympic coach, you're going to be doing that. Is that also another way you guys have -- I don't want to necessarily say bonded, but another thing you can relate about together?

COACH AURIEMMA: Yeah, I mean, it's just a matter of people getting older and, you know, a lot of water passes under the bridge, I guess they say.

And I think Tara VanDerveer was in somewhat of a difficult situation coaching the Olympic team. The comment about Nykesha Sales was our first really -- I mean, the first big-time All-American other than Rebecca. And at the time Stanford was getting three, four, five All-Americans every year.

That was neither here nor there. But the Olympic thing, I think, was difficult because so much of the attention was focused on Rebecca Lobo and national media and not necessarily on the Olympic team. It wasn't Rebecca's fault and it wasn't Tara VanDerveer's fault. It was just more people in America in 1995 knew who Rebecca Lobo was instead of Teresa Edwards, let's say, or Jennifer Azzi or Dawn Staley, because Rebecca came along at a different time and a different era.

I think Rebecca paid a price for it. And she shouldn't have had to pay that price, because it wasn't her fault. But that's over and done with. And I've always had tremendous respect for Tara as a coach. I really didn't know her that well as a person, but we spent a lot of time talking over the years. And it's kind of one of the reasons why this series that we had with them is going to be a good series for both of us.

She doesn't shy away from challenges, and neither do I. And I think we each have a healthy respect for each other as coaches and I think as people.

And I think she respects how we do our job and the kind of kids we recruit and the way we run our program. And I certainly feel the same way about them. They're in some ways a reflection of her, and my team's a reflection of me, and we all live happily ever after.

Q. Is there one aspect of this matchup based on the first game in December from your standpoint that you feel is absolutely necessary for you guys to win, for it to happen? Was it matchup or one aspect of the game? If there is one, what would it be?

COACH AURIEMMA: You've got two really, really good offensive teams out there. Two teams that are not necessarily one-dimensional. And when you have that, something's gotta give.

If both teams are able to offensively do whatever they like to do and how they like to do it and are successful at it, you know, it's a 90-to-87 game, one way or the other. But I don't know that that's going to happen.

So whichever team, I think, can defensively force the other team to be uncomfortable, the way I like to say it, I think that would be, to me, the biggest matchup.

I don't think we can guard them and shut them down completely. And I don't think they can guard us and shut us down completely. So something has to emerge from the offensive end tomorrow, and I would venture to say, you know, it's going to be difficult for both teams to find a way to stop the other team from scoring points.

Q. I understand that after the first Stanford game you pulled Nneka aside and complimented her on just how much she had improved. Could you expound on that a little bit after last night and where she is right now?

COACH AURIEMMA: Yeah, I really appreciate and I really admire kids who take it seriously, they take the responsibility of being a college athlete seriously. I watched her play as a freshman. And then I saw her on film as a sophomore before we played them in December. And I just thought it was a completely different player.

And I admire that, because that means she took her scholarship seriously. She took the responsibility that was put on her seriously to get better and get better and get better, and a lot of kids don't do that. They don't. They just take it for granted or they just expect that it's going to happen without their having to work at it.

And I just love everything about the kid, who she is, how she conducts herself, how she competes. I can't say enough about her, really.

Q. Coach, could you talk about how Maya kind of symbolizes your ability to recruit the South and the importance of recruiting the South?

COACH AURIEMMA: We haven't had a lot of players from down that way. It's only been in the last couple of years that we've had a lot of

success. Maya and Tiffany are probably the two more prominent players from down that way.

I think when you have a certain kind of kid who isn't confined by family situations or just fear of leaving home and they want to be exposed to the highest level, you know, you have a chance with those kids.

I would say Tiffany and Maya were probably two of the easier recruiting efforts that we had to actually put in, because I think they knew what they wanted. So it wasn't almost like we went down there and convinced them or cajoled them to come to Connecticut. I think both of them understood this is where I want to be. This is where I need to be to satisfy my own self and my curiosity and how I want to be challenged.

It's not easy down there -- down here. Out this way it's impossible. Forget it. There's no way you're getting a kid from down here to go to Connecticut. It's easier for me to get a Russian kid, which I have (laughter).

But, yeah, the right kids, they'll go anywhere if it's the right situation. And we've been fortunate with those two, no question.

Q. We heard Kalana talk a little bit about your strong suits as a coach. And I guess it's your drive in getting these kids to focus on those little things. Now that you're on the threshold of a perfect season in history, does perfection become a moving target still, or will you be satisfied with that perfect season, even if there's some imperfections in how you won the game?

COACH AURIEMMA: You know, this whole -- I think sometimes the whole perfect thing gets bandied around and it means different things to different people, you know?

The only thing I've ever tried to impress upon my players is there's a certain amount of perfection in your effort. The perfection, I don't think, lies in what the outcome is. There's a certain effort that requires a certain amount of perfection; that you're looking for the perfect way to consistently have that effort.

That at the end of 40 minutes, if your effort was unwavering and your commitment during that game or during that practice was unwavering and you never ever took a step back, lost your concentration or just decided I don't feel like it or for whatever reason didn't have that same commitment to every possession, I don't care about the outcome, and I think sometimes that gets lost.

I said this last night. We ran a couple of plays for Maya. She absolutely executed those things perfectly. Whether the shot went in or not, there's no complaining about that, because there's no way you can control that. But I can control how she uses that screen, how she sets that screen, how she makes that cut. That's what I'm talking about in chasing that perfection thing.

Once she gets the ball in her hands, if it goes in, it goes in. If it doesn't go in, it doesn't go in. Like the 3 she air-balled. She did everything right and it was an air ball. So you can't worry about what happened after you do everything right.

So I don't want people to think that tomorrow the only thing that's acceptable is absolutely no mistakes, absolutely a perfect game, we shoot 60 percent from the floor and we hold them to 40 points and we win 90 to 40. That's not my definition of things. I want our effort tomorrow to be perfect.

Q. I think I remember correctly, you took blame for the Stanford first half thing, running the wrong defense. Can you talk about the defensive effort? You said before how offense -- everyone loves a 90-87 game, but realistically that's not going to happen. And you guys have been shutting everyone down. What is the difference in the defense you guys have in the last five games?

COACH AURIEMMA: It comes down to matchups, too. Stanford's a difficult matchup for us. I think any team -- and we're a difficult matchup for most people. I think any team that has some versatility in their offense and can get you from a couple different spots on the floor, it's hard.

You can't defend everything. Defending Baylor is one thing because you know what their strengths are, what their weaknesses are, and you can kind of play the percentages.

But when you're playing a team like Stanford, there's less weaknesses that you can attack on your own defense. So it makes the challenge a little greater. The first game, what I was alluding to was -- Maya didn't answer the question. I forget who asked Maya about the first game and Stanford. That's why I was telling Kalana, I said: Do you ever think she would say, Well, we were up 19 to 9 and then I was a dumb-ass and got my second foul and I had to sit and then they tied it up, so I'm going to try not to

get my second foul in the first seven minutes of the game?

But Maya is not going to say that. But the other four guys knew that's what happened.

So a lot of it is your defense is dictated by who you have on the floor. So if we've got the right guys on the floor, and we're not in foul trouble, we can play a certain kind of defense. We can get out and pressure more, change defenses more and take more chances.

But all of a sudden we were limited in that game so we had to play a certain kind of defense that wasn't conducive for us. In the second half, we could come out and play the way we wanted to play and defend the way we wanted to defend and it changed the game.

We could do the exact same thing tomorrow and it wouldn't work. But that day it did. Tomorrow it might be something completely different. Tomorrow the defense we played in the first half, which didn't work, might work great.

That's the beauty of every game. That's the beauty of every game. You go out there and this is what we're going to do. And they pick it apart. You go, all right, time to change.

That's why I get the big bucks, man (laughter). I said that 100 times.

Q. Along that line, Tara is known as a pretty meticulous scout. How well prepared do you expect them to be for your team?

COACH AURIEMMA: I mean, it's Stanford. They probably study all the time (laughter). They're great at reading books and figuring stuff out, and that's one of their strengths, I think. It's one of Tara's great strengths is they are disciplined. They are meticulous. They do execute. They're precise in what they do. No question about that.

And I would think that after having played us now -- this is the third year in a row in the Final Four and third year in a row -- second out of three years that we played in the regular season, I think. I lose track sometimes.

And they've seen us at our best and they've seen us at our worst. They've seen us at full strength in St. Thomas where we blew them out and they've seen us missing two starters in the Final Four. So I don't think there's any scenario that they're not going to be prepared for come tomorrow night.

When did they play, Monday or Tuesday last week?

Q. Monday.

COACH AURIEMMA: Another team that has an extra day of rest (laughter).

Q. For the first time in a long time it seems, to borrow a fighter's analogy, you guys got punched back against the ropes last night. I mean, you talk all season long about this team's determination, their resolve. But to see it actually when it had to have happened, when they had to come back and punch themselves off the ropes and come back and take over, how gratifying was that?

COACH AURIEMMA: Well, extremely. We know we had that in us, but you don't know until you have to show it. One of the quirks of the NCAA tournament, the way it played out, there's nothing you can do about this. Baylor played Monday night. We played Tuesday night. They go home and they've got an hour bus ride and we have to fly four hours here with one day less to prepare and we're playing, and that's just a quirk. It's just the way it happened.

And then we get two guys in foul trouble. We're zigging and zagging. And I think all those things give you a chance to prove something to yourself that you maybe don't have an opportunity to prove.

And that's why I think last night, in the locker room, there was a different look on the kids' faces. They were like, yeah, that's that was really good because it was a tough week and it was a tough game and they were tough circumstances.

When you're a competitor, those are the kind of situations you love to find yourself in. Because you're tested under fire a lot of times. And we haven't been under fire enough. And yesterday was good. Yesterday was really good.

Q. Coach, easy question and then maybe a little tougher one. Tara said before that she hopes the series continues past the Palo Alto game next year. You've got two California kids coming in as freshmen. I'm wondering what your thoughts are about that. Secondly, you always tell us how you feel about things. You're always very honest and you usually say them in a manner that's very direct and entertaining. I'm wondering if you ever worry about how your words are perceived nationally by the other coaches that hear you speak? Especially the sound bites on

ESPN. I'm talking about yesterday what you said to Mark about the competition and, you know, if you were 38-0 again next March that you were going to leave the game. Do you think you make more enemies by saying things like that, or are you even concerned about that?

COACH AURIEMMA: Well, I don't think why -- why would I make an enemy out of somebody if I said that I think there are teams out there good enough to beat us. I would think that's a sign of respect for the other teams; that they're really good and I would expect us to lose because we're playing really good teams.

I've always been one to think, you know, you need to just get up in the morning and think about your own team, what do you have to do to make yourselves better, how can I prepare my team better, how can I recruit better, how can I coach better, organize my staff better and all that.

If you're spending five minutes, five seconds worrying about what Geno Auriemma says, then you lost already. I mean, that's the way I look at it. I say things that I think are meant to -- I never disrespect the other coaches or the other teams. And never have and never will.

And there's a lot of people out there that, for whatever reason, worry too much about what other people say. I've never been one to worry about it. I laugh at it. I think it's pretty funny. I kind of look forward to it.

And people rile me up thinking that I'm going to say something and do something that's going to be crazy. And they don't realize that I'm not like that anymore. I'm gentle and kind and lovable (laughter).

But they keep bringing me stuff. Somebody brought something into the locker room last night before the game; that Kim said that she hoped Brittney would dunk on Tina and that I would lose my mind on the sidelines.

So the kids all read it and -- because you have to understand something: I'm not like an Internet guy. I don't read blogs or chat rooms. So I don't know what's going on in the real world. I've said this before: If it's not in the newspaper or not on ESPN, I don't know that it existed, to be honest with you, because I don't do that kind of stuff.

I don't know what people are saying or thinking or any of that. I know nothing. I'm Sergeant Schultz. And I know absolutely nothing when it comes to that kind of stuff.

So when people bring me this stuff, I'm just -- I get a kick out of it. I laugh. And my players get a kick out of it. They think it's pretty funny.

Kim made a comment about Georgetown was the second-best team in the Big East and they would finish like eighth in the Big 12 or something. And our kids get a kick out of that, because we beat the second-place team in the Big 12 by 40.

Q. Are you ignoring my question about Stanford?

COACH AURIEMMA: We're going to play Stanford just like everybody else. As long as Tara wants to play, we'll play them. We'll play. We'll play all the good teams as long as they want to play us. We've never taken a phone call from a really good program and said no. And that will never happen. Anybody that wants to play us, as long as we can get a date, we're playing you.

Q. You and Tara are about the same age. She talked about growing up, no high school team for girls and she'd go to the Y and play against guys and stuff. Your situation was different. You came in at age eight from Italy. What was your introduction to basketball? Did you know anything about it when you got here? And wasn't there a story when you were in high school you were signing your own report card so you could keep playing or something like that?

COACH AURIEMMA: Come on, you're making me sound like a dummy. Just because I took advantage of the fact my parents can't read and write, come on. You're supposed to figure that stuff out when you're a kid, aren't you? I showed them my report cards. I told them they were really good (laughter). I said A means awful. C means really cool. I took advantage of the situation.

My mother told me that I used to walk a couple miles when I was a kid in Italy, four, five years old, to this playground. There were a lot of servicemen in Italy. They had a basketball court set up. I would go watch basketball games. She said I was just fascinated by it.

So maybe it was just always in there, you know? And when I came to this country, the first thing I fell in love with was baseball. I had never seen a baseball game. I was just fascinated by it and played it every single day of my life if I could, still would play today if I could.

But had to do something in the wintertime.

And I got cut all the time until I got to high school and some reason or another I made the team, I played, enjoyed it. And just kind of always had an eye for it, you know? Like I saw it.

Like my daughter's an actress. You can't teach that. It's in you. Or a musician. It's in you. You can read all the books you want, read all the manuals you want, go to all the clinics you want, but if it's not in you, if it's not a part of who you are, it's just hard to be good at it. It's really hard to be good at it.

My daughter's music teacher got mad at me one time because I wasn't making my daughter play the piano with notes. I said: If you don't start reading notes, I'm going to stop taking you to piano lessons. And she closed her eyes and she said: Dad, watch. She played this one tune and she said: That's talent.

What the hell am I going to say to that (laughter)?

Q. Throughout this whole 77 games, whatever, it's always been about the goal, not the streak, the championship. Has that been something that's been hard for you to get across to them? Have they been able to do it on their own? And is some of the talk about the streak kind of helped them focus on the goal and not the streak?

COACH AURIEMMA: I heard -- it was funny. I heard Kalana Greene answer that question one time. And I thought she gave the best answer of anybody that's been asked that question. And I think her answer was something to the effect: You know, when I sign a letter of intent to come to Connecticut, I didn't come to win 70 in a row. I came to win national championships.

So that kind of mentality is where our team is, and it's always been about what do we have to do to win the regular season championship in the Big East or the tournament championship, or win the first round. It's never been discussed at all, the numbers.

I talked about it one time, to be honest with you. After we got to 70 or 71, I said, hey, what you guys have done has been really, really good. It's something you all should be really proud of. But those 71 don't mean anything unless we win six in a row in a couple of weeks.

So we haven't talked about it. I don't know if they talk about it among themselves. I don't know what they're doing. I don't know how they do it. But whatever they're doing, I hope they keep doing it.

Q. You know Jayne Appel's game pretty well. What do you see as far as the ankle and how it's impacted her in the last few weeks?

COACH AURIEMMA: I think at this time of the year, now, this weekend, I don't think there's anything that's going to keep you from playing and playing as well as you can. Everybody's hurt at this time of the year. Everybody's sore. There's something going on in everybody's body.

When Jayne's 100 percent, I don't think there's anybody who works as hard as she does. I shouldn't say -- who works harder than she does. I think her ability to score with both hands and she's a terrific passer and she runs the floor great.

I do think it's going to be crucial, that matchup between her and Tina, like it always is. I don't think her -- whatever limits she may have ankle-wise, I don't think they're going to be an issue tomorrow night. But that might be one reason why Nneka's just exploded, you know? Maybe she's getting more opportunities because of that.

Q. Two-part question. Eleven Final Four, I believe eight different cities. Your favorite, for whatever reasons why? And, secondly, like tough love with your children, you've always gotten the most out of your players. And Tina was someone who came here with loads of talent, but you could see early on that she needed to be challenged. And you've certainly gotten the most out of her. How are you able to do that with your players?

COACH AURIEMMA: Some players you can't. I mean, I've tried that same thing with other players and just didn't get anywhere with it. I think all the credit goes to Tina and how hard she's been willing to work, and never backed down and has always come back for more, above and beyond anything that you would think a person would want to do.

She's a pleaser. And kids who want to please, who want to do well, who have certain goals, they're going to take whatever you throw at them and come back and come back. They just have to learn how to. It's not that they don't want to. They just have to learn how to.

And that's been Tina's biggest strength. I think she wants to. She just needed to learn how to do it and keep doing it the same way.

There's some kids, they say it, but they don't really want to. With those kids you can't get anywhere. You try and you try and you try, but you don't get anywhere with them.

Q. And favorite Final Four site?

COACH AURIEMMA: Favorite Final Four site. Minneapolis. Philadelphia. San Antonio. St. Louis. New Orleans. Atlanta.

Philadelphia was my finest, because it was home. All my friends, my family, everybody was there. That was 1.

This is 1-A. This is a great town. I wish they could have it here every year. I really do. I think the fans have the best experience here. I think the teams have the best experience here.

The people here do a phenomenal job of hosting the event. I don't think anybody in the coaching community or in the same community would be disappointed if San Antonio had the Final Four every single year. I just wish our hotel bar would stay open later. Somebody call them.

Q. During this run you've had you've played the same teams numerous teams: Notre Dame, teams in the Big East, Louisville three times. It seems every time you play a team the second time or third time, you make it a worst beating on them and you beat them by more. Is there something to that?

COACH AURIEMMA: That's putting me in a bad spot right now. I think it comes down to the players and the matchup and what it is. And Louisville and Connecticut is just a bad matchup last year for Louisville.

There are some advantages and some disadvantages for playing somebody twice on both sides. Don't get me wrong. On both sides. They're playing us, and they know they lost and it got away from them badly in the second half. They know they played us and they were up at halftime and pretty much could do what they wanted. And the same goes for us.

We know we played great in the second half. And hopefully we can do that again. We also know that we couldn't stop them in the first half.

So we learned some things about each other that can help us and also worry us tremendously. That's why I kind of like playing teams for the very first time. Like yesterday's game. They didn't know that much about us. And we didn't know much about them. I like that matchup a lot better than playing somebody for the second time or the third time.



visit our archives at asapsports.com

Q. This Stanford-UConn rivalry has been a little strange because one team seems to dominate the other. This game is down to the wire with the national championship on the line with two best teams in the country. What would that mean, you think, in the big picture? There's been a lot of talk about you're good or bad for the game. What would that mean for this game to have -- the game between the two best teams in the country?

COACH AURIEMMA: I think that's the hope of everybody every NCAA game. I think everybody that turns on the television, everybody that's at an event in the NCAA tournament, I think that's their secret wish; that somebody makes a shot as time's running out. Somebody drives the length of the court, like Jeanette Pohlen did, and makes a layup and you win and you go to the Final Four.

I think that's every kid's dream and every coach's dream, or nightmare if you're on the other end. And every fan loves that kind of an ending. It's what makes sports so exciting.

We haven't made it very exciting, I guess. Our players were saying, man, our fans were really quiet. Did you hear that Baylor crowd? They were really loud. It wasn't just Baylor. All the Stanford people were jumping up and down hoping that Baylor would win.

So it's what everybody wants. And I think it would be pretty neat to be in that kind of a game, as a coach, as a player, for the fans. I bet you that was a pretty highly viewed game last night. I don't know the numbers. I don't know any statistics. But I bet a lot of people tuned into that game last night.

And when Baylor cut it to 3, they were pretty excited about it. So I think that's what people want. And hopefully they'll get that. Not (laughter).

Q. You're 6-and-0 in this game.

COACH AURIEMMA: Like that means anything.

Q. I think there's only one other coach in the history of sports who can say that he or she has never lost this game in at least that many tries, right? John Wooden. I think that's it. The kids come and go. You stay. And you always play well in this game. Why?

COACH AURIEMMA: You know, my

president and my AD are here; you ought to tell them that and explain to them exactly what you just said to me. I would like that.

And I wish I could give you an answer for that other than I always, always thought that whenever we made it to this game we were the best team.

There was never a time when we played in this game that we were the underdog. Now, we may have been. I don't know. But I always thought we were the best team; that if we could get to this game that we were the best team because we would have proved it along the way.

And then it was my job to just make sure we played like the best team. I have never been in this game -- well, maybe just in Philadelphia -- I think Philadelphia was the only time. I don't think I've ever coached a game in this game -- a team in this game where we didn't have the best player in if country, except maybe Philadelphia.

So that's a lot -- go ahead. You're thinking. Go ahead.

Q. Who would have been the best player in 2000?

COACH AURIEMMA: I said other than Philadelphia. Other than Philadelphia, that might have been the only time when we didn't have the Player of the Year on our team.

Q. I'm saying who was it?

COACH AURIEMMA: I don't know. I know it wasn't Sue or Swin or any of those guys. Catchings, maybe. I don't know. But that may have been the only time.

So as much as I would love to say it's because of me, I've always brought with me the best player, the best team. And that, believe me, is 90 percent of the whole thing. You know?

Most of the time that's what you need. You can't fool anybody in the final game. There's no trickery going on tomorrow. There's no secret stuff. There's no great strategy that's going to win tomorrow's game. Tomorrow's game is going to be won by the best players.

I've always thought that. I've always, always thought that. You can have a great system of play. You can have a great style of play, and our style of play and our system and our culture is pretty much designed to get us to the Sweet 16.

I would like to think that year in and year out, the way we operate can get us to Sweet 16 and we've done that on a regular basis. But from that point on, there's going to be a player, or two if

you're fortunate, that's going to decide in those two games and the next two games that we're going to win.

And I've always been fortunate to have that.

Q. Why do you think you saw basketball so well? Was it having grown up watching and knowing soccer, or --

COACH AURIEMMA: I think that's a big part of it. That's a big part. The next pass, the next pass, the next pass. That's why our team passes the ball so much, maybe. I've always been fascinated by the pass.

And I think growing up as a kid, that's what soccer is. I love recruiting soccer players. Kids who played soccer in high school are really good basketball players. Because they see that the goal that that guy's going to have comes from the pass I'm going to make to you.

And very few kids see that. Very few kids see that. I loved the Edmonton Oilers when they played hockey. How could you not love that? I'm just fascinated by the pass. I don't know why. I just think it's so cool.

And you just don't see it very often anymore. And Stanford's a very good passing team. I hate playing against teams that are good passing teams. I love teams that don't pass the ball. I love playing against them (laughter). You're not doing anything; you just have to stand there and let them self-destruct.

But teams that really pass the ball well, man, they're hard to play against. Really hard to play against. I love recruiting players that love to pass. There's very few players that play for me if you're not a good passer. And I think that explains a lot of why we have good teams year after year after year. There's tremendous value in our program put on passing the ball.

Q. Tomorrow is Jayne Appel's last game in a Stanford jersey, speaking of passing. You recruited her. What do you think her legacy is when she leaves?

COACH AURIEMMA: Certainly her legacy will be enhanced a thousand percent if they win tomorrow night. Because every kid would love to see themselves as national champions. And there's nothing greater than winning the last game of your college career and riding off into the sunset, winning a national championship.

But short of that, I think what she's done for Stanford is put them -- not single-handedly, don't get me wrong, because I think they're a big enough program -- but I think she's helped put them back into the limelight where I think they had not been there for a couple of years.

I think when she came in with that group that she's in there with right now, and Candice Wiggins, who left, I think they put Stanford back into that national championship picture. And that's something to be proud of and to always take with you.

I knew when I was recruiting her out of high school she was going to be a great center, great basketball player, because, again, skilled with both hands and terrific passer, competitor. Tough kid.

They're the kind of kids that leave college feeling pretty satisfied. Pretty fulfilled. And I think tomorrow night, if they were to win, would be the ultimate for her. And I'm not saying she needs that, but I think that would pretty much put it over the edge.

Q. Do you see similarities in the two back courts? They aren't necessarily the first, second, even third options, but when they need to, they seem to have the ability, the tough-as-nails, gritty-type player that can make the plays on both ends of the court. And do you see your back court and Stanford in the same realm?

COACH AURIEMMA: There's a couple of differences. This is Caroline's first NCAA tournament. You know? I don't think they have anybody in their back court that this is their first NCAA tournament. This is their third national championship game in a row.

Two out of three, right? So their back court is a little more experienced than ours. Our kids are young. And I think the other big difference is their guards don't fall down. Tiffany falls down every possession (laughter).

So they have a huge advantage, because their kids stay on their feet. They don't shoot as many air balls as my guys do. They don't foul as much as my guys do. They're pretty solid in the back court.

But whichever back court makes the most shots tomorrow could be the difference in the game. I agree with that 100 percent.

Caroline's like: You gotta put yesterday behind us; we're going forward. When I came into pregame today -- I mean breakfast this morning,

she was like this, head down on the table, half asleep, half -- probably all those bricks running around in her head. Because she's a competitor, you know?

And that's why I don't feel bad about tomorrow. Caroline and Tiffany are going to make shots tomorrow. Put it in the book. They're going to make shots tomorrow. Or they're going to fall down trying or foul out. One or the other.

You know what, good players don't foul out. You don't want a player that fouls out or plays with four fouls. That's how you can tell a really good player. So next time you're watching a game in there, just think, you know what, that guy's a really good player. Why? They don't foul. They don't foul.

Because when you foul, you have to sit on the bench. How can you be a good player if you're sitting on the bench with fouls? Good players don't foul.

Maya is a different breed. Maya swears she doesn't foul, so that probably helps her. She doesn't know why she's on the bench. You have two fouls. No, I don't. That wasn't me. It says it right up there on the board, Maya. No. 23, two fouls. Good players don't foul.

Q. I maybe stirring up a hornet's nest, but I'll try anyway. You go back to '93 with Swoopes and you could almost make the argument from that point forward that by and large the team that's won the championship each year from then forward has had the best player. What does that say? I mean, you couldn't say that in the men's game. I don't think anybody would argue that Butler, Duke, West Virginia or Michigan State has the best player in that Final Four. What do you think it says about this game and when does that change?

COACH AURIEMMA: Never. It's not supposed to change. The best players are supposed to win a national championship. And the best team is supposed to have the best players.

Now, the reason why it doesn't happen on the men's side is because the best player is a freshman and then he leaves. So he's not ready to win a national championship, a lot of times. So Duke, Butler don't need the best player. The best player is John Wall, everybody says. But he's not experienced enough, mature enough to win a national championship. So he's out of the

tournament and the two best teams are playing for the national championship.

And that's the way it is in women's basketball, generally. The two best teams are generally left standing and they happen to have the best players. That's why they're the best teams.

So we probably wouldn't be here this year if we had the same rule as the guys have that you can leave. Because Maya and Tina would be gone. So in women's basketball, the one cool thing about it is you're always going to see the best teams playing in the Final Four. Because we always have the best players.

Is that going to change? It might. It's happened before. And it will happen again. If you said that Oklahoma was going to be in the Final Four, nobody would have believed that at the beginning of the season. So it's going to happen probably more often.

But it will never be like the guys where you're going to get four teams that don't have a First Team All-American coming to the Final Four. That's not going to happen. But on the guys, that's going to happen every year. Because as soon as a guy's really good, out. Carmelo Anthony. One of those things.

That's why it's hard on the men's side in some ways. But in other ways, it may not be that hard, because you're not always playing against the best teams. You know, people talk about there's upsets along the way. Yeah, which means that now if you're a really good team you're not playing another really good team. You're playing somebody that upset the really good team. And so you've got a lot of that. Women's basketball, you're going to have to beat the best teams generally all the time to get where you're going.

It's just a different dynamic, different dynamic. But I would be surprised if Baylor and Brittney Griner, for instance, aren't in the Final Four the next three years. She's probably going to be the best player. If we're here again next year, it's because Maya was the best player in the country again.

I just don't see that changing until, if ever, they change the rule, which I don't think they ever will. Nor should they. If Tina or Maya play in the WNBA from sophomore year on, I think the game of basketball, women's basketball wouldn't be as good. I think it's good right now because the best players stay for four years. And I think the guys' game is good because they leave. It might not

make a lot of sense, but it does make a lot of sense.

Q. Just maybe to follow up on that. You've been heard to say I guess on the "Outside Lines" report that one time it came out earlier -- I saw it in Dayton -- you were talking about how maybe your career would be somehow fulfilled if you went on the men's side and did what you're doing now. Do you look at that in terms of a different challenge if you were to ever consider that? And there are a lot of men's jobs open right now. And it's been reported that the Nets are going to offer Mike Krzyzewski 15 to 12 mill, and you've said that --

COACH AURIEMMA: Is that a year or total?

Q. A year.

COACH AURIEMMA: A year. That opens up the Duke job, huh?

Q. There's also the Boston College job. Mike DiMauro wants you to consider that one, too.

COACH AURIEMMA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Sure.

Q. Your thoughts, though?

COACH AURIEMMA: We win 30 games every year and I'm going to go someplace where I'm going to get killed.

Q. A challenge?

COACH AURIEMMA: Yeah, it's a challenge. I'm 56. I like the challenge that I have right now.

I said this to somebody else: I think in every person there's always this thought of what about that. I mean, if you're a high school coach -- I know some great high school coaches on the men's side and the women's side who are struggling with that decision: Should I stay where I am because I'm really, really good but I really want to take a shot at a college assistant's job and maybe get a college job, men's or women's? And I know a ton of college coaches on the men's side, especially, that would just give their right arm to coach in the NBA.

It's just -- you know, there's always that other thing that seems like people want to try to experience. And I probably had that in me for the

longest time. Like anybody else would. Like anybody else would. I just have one huge advantage over everybody else. I never had to make that decision because nobody ever asked me.

So I don't know what I would have done years ago if that opportunity ever came along when I was young. So I've given a lot to this game on the women's side. This game has given me more than I probably have ever given it. And I'm not looking for any change or any other challenge than the challenge that I have in front of me right now.

Unless Mike called me and said he would give me 2 million a year to be his assistant with the Nets because that's the greatest job in the history of sports, being an assistant NBA coach. I may have the best job in all of sports. But I'll tell you what, you gotta be pretty hard to find a better job, an assistant in the NBA to a great guy.

You get up. You go to practice. You're working with the best players. Watching film. Doing individual work. Go to the game. Trying to figure out how to beat these guys that are great. Game's over. No media. No press conference. Nobody asking you why you suck.

Go out to dinner. Nice glass of wine, go home and do it again the next day. Come on, that's like dying and going to heaven.

Q. If he calls and says come to the Nets?

COACH AURIEMMA: Two million (laughter).

Not taking it for any less. You hear that, Mike? Two million.

Q. For all who were here, not watching ESPN yesterday, what did you say to that guy about leaving, and was it a joke they didn't get? Or what happened there?

COACH AURIEMMA: What guy?

Q. What John asked you about a while ago, said you would leave or something if you were undefeated next year and they didn't get the joke?

COACH AURIEMMA: No, I didn't say that. I didn't say that. People keep wanting me to talk about next season. Man, if you win tomorrow and you're only ten away from ADA, you know, I said: You're out of your mind. Really out of your mind.

That's when I made the comment that we play eight out of our 11 nonconference games before January 1st, and they were all at one time in the top 15 in the country this year.

And if we can get through that kind of schedule with five freshmen, it's not going to happen. It's not. If it does happen, I'll quit right there on the spot. February 1st. I'll walk away. I said this -- I can't do this anymore. Sorry.

Q. I was going to follow him up and say so we tell Blazewski that next year when New York is open you've got no interest in coaching the Liberty in New York --

COACH AURIEMMA: No, 2 million minimum. I'm not leaving from Connecticut for anything less than 2 million, plus a car, a driver, a house. Not moving. My own personal publicist. Otherwise I'm staying right where I am.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports