

March 12, 2009



Kansas State - 68 Colorado - 51

An interview with:
Kathy McConnell-Miller, Head Coach, Colorado

THE MODERATOR:
Coach, your comments?

COACH McCONNELL-MILLER: Clearly not the outcome or the first half that we had wanted. We felt like from a preparation standpoint, we had come in and made good adjustments that were fairly effective for probably the first six or eight minutes.

From a defensive standpoint, we knew that Lehning was the one that needed the ball in her hands for them to get going, and we made adjustments of going under the ball screens, gapping a little bit more, which is what we felt hurt us so much a couple days before, five days before.

And with that -- players like Sweat and Kincaid, probably controlled them better than we did the first time, and they stepped up and made shots. We knew we needed touches for Kara to be effective.

We didn't have good movement with or without the ball, and I credit K-State, I think they're a talented team. They've got three players that are as dangerous as any in the league and they got the ball in their hands and made plays.

They're efficient with the basketball, and when the ball is -- which the shot clock is running down, they know how to make plays. This is a team where three years ago they were freshmen and sophomores, where we had handled and played probably the best basketball, but now they're seniors and now they're very experienced.

And they're players that can make plays, do make plays, and at times make you look like you don't know what you're doing out there. I think that was probably the biggest part of tonight's game is mentally I think we shutdown in the first half, but when we got in, we regrouped in the

second half, I thought with adjustments and a little coaching, a little encouragement, I thought we responded.

Q. Kara, it looked like you were ready to go from the opening tip. Were you disappointed that you didn't get a lot of help until it was too late?

KARA RICHARDS: I think offensively we did attack. Some of the shots weren't falling, and when they started to fall, especially for Spears, then it took a lot of pressure off the inside.

I think defensively, though, we really hooked up, we knew our assignments and we knew them very well.

Q. Kara, can you talk about playing your last game as a Colorado Buffalo?

KARA RICHARDS: Yes. I remember --

THE MODERATOR: Did you want to take a second?

KARA RICHARDS: Yes. The --

Q. The guards had trouble scoring, and you were chasing them around the wing. Was that because you were trying to play both ends?

ALYSSA FRESSLE: I don't know if it was chasing them around, but like Coach said, we knew we had to go into Kara to be successful, and that made us a little bit stagnant on the offensive end.

And I think I forced some things and -- early, and then probably played a little timid the rest of the game. And I think -- I mean, Spears stepped up, though. She did well in the second half.

THE MODERATOR: You want to try again, Kara?

KARA RICHARDS: Yes, sir. It was difficult going back into the locker room after the end of the game, knowing that it's not going to be there again. I'm surely grateful for all five years that I've been here, they've been really great.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, thank you.
Questions for Coach?

Q. Coach, what do you think players like Alyssa learned this year and what do they need to do to be more like K-State players when they're older?

COACH McCONNELL-MILLER: I think her biggest strength and probably her biggest weakness and that's her will, how strong she is. And I think in high school she willed herself to be the best and to score and to get her team to where they needed to be.

And in saying that, I think it's sometimes her greatest weakness, and not allowing change in her game and change in some of the things that have been successful at the high school level.

I think transitioning for her was greater than she had anticipated it would be. I think she has learned a great deal from playing in the Big 12. She has played a lot of minutes as a freshman. We're excited that she was recognized as one of the top 5 freshmen in the conference, but we know that her best days are ahead of her.

And with a willing mind -- there is no doubt she is going to work, but at this point, I think she knows what it is she needs to work on. As a result of that, we are going to see a different player next year.

When you're thrown into it, it's hard to sit back and evaluate. We've tried a lot of different things with her from film to one-on-one meetings, to chalk talk, board talk, and even watching edits of players in the WNBA or top players in the country.

I know that the desire to get better is there. I think the will to learn and make some adjustments at this level, once she sits back, that will come with her.

Q. Kathy, that youthful exuberance from her and some of the others, is that why the sloppy turnovers, they're ahead of the ball and the ball goes out of bounds, trying to get back too much when you're falling behind?

COACH McCONNELL-MILLER: I think if we were deeper, and didn't lose what we lose when we go to the bench, lack of experience, the ability to pull players and have a tighter leash would help on things, but there is definitely -- all I have to draw on is Shalee Lehning as a freshman and her now, the rigors of night in and night out basketball.

We are young and our backcourt is young, and we're handling that very well, from Alyssa to

Kelly Jo, we don't have somebody that can control the tempo and that's a very difficult situation to be in.

You know, we've tried to manage it and hide it at times and, you know, find ways to take better care of the basketball. So I think with experience, with the return of Whitney Houston, with the addition of Chuckie Jeffrey, our backcourt gets very athletic.

Whitney does have two years' of experience and the year off is going to be the best thing for her. It wasn't the best thing for this team, but it will definitely be the best thing individually for her.

Q. You only got 41 shots tonight, and it looked like 28 of them were from Spears or Richards. Does that go back to the offense being stagnant?

COACH McCONNELL-MILLER: I don't think you're going to be very good with only two people scoring, and I think that evolved this year. If you look at our season, Bianca averaged 21 points and today it was 5.

We have needed more scorers all year long, we have not had a consistent third scorer, and it's evolved into that. And teams have changed the way they played us, you even have to watch film.

Statistically you look at a sheet and you know where the shots are coming from, so even though Kelly Jo Mullaney is probably one of our most consistent shooters, they were 15 feet off of her to try and stop Kara Richards.

And as much as we worked on this week, the skip pass, making sure that Kara is on the opposite side, these players can and have the ability, but you get to the point throughout the year when you know that Kara can do it and Brittany has done it, and they get somewhere inside themselves and they don't allow that to happen.

We need more scoring. I thought with Jackie gone, we would become a more balanced scoring team, and we were early on this year, and it's evolved into another two players.

I've got to look at myself and figure out how that's happening, and we've got to look at each other, too, and make sure that we've got the right players in there that are -- that have the ability and have the mental toughness to take a shot, and you know, we don't have that right now.

We were relying on two players. We knew

early on that Spears and Kara, they had scored 48 -- 40 of our 44 points at one point.

Q. Coach, can you talk about losing a player like Kara Richards, last year you lost Jackie and now Kara is done, can you talk about what she's meant to the program?

COACH McCONNELL-MILLER: I'm proud of her development, there is no doubt about that. She played quite a bit her freshman year, and her sophomore year she was injured. And when she came back, she took a backseat to Jackie.

Jackie had two years under her belt and her personality is "I want to take care of people", and she would do everything within her power to make sure Jackie got what she needed and she stepped aside.

And I think it wasn't until Jackie left that she realized she had the skill and the ability, and she continued to work on it, and once she had a little success, you saw the mental toughness, the heart.

And this is one thing I've said after every game, the one thing that we know is Colorado has Kara Richards' heart. Every game, every practice, every time-out she was the one that was pulling people together, she is a great leader.

I think lesser teams, as far as chemistry and leadership, would fall apart in seasons like this, when it's so up and down and inconsistent, but I think she, from a leadership standpoint, kept them together on and off the floor. So she'll be missed.

And, you know, just as Jackie left and left a spot for her, I think she'll hopefully have prepared Courtney and Julie and led the way for them, so it's a tough, young woman to lose in your program.

THE MODERATOR: Okay, Coach, thank you very much.

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An interview with:
Deb Patterson, Head Coach, Kansas State

MODERATOR:
Welcome, Coach?

COACH PATTERSON: For an opening round, Big 12 tournament game, we're extremely proud of this victory.

Playing a team a third time and coming in back-to-back is challenging, and I thought our players were emotionally mature, and I think their effort was strong tonight. It was tremendous for us to feel like we could get that first-round win, we're pleased to be advancing.

And we understand the magnitude of the challenge and appreciate the unbelievable play that Kara has brought to the Big 12 Conference for her career. She has been a handful for everybody in the league, and goes out shooting 80 percent from the floor and scoring over 20 points.

It was a great final-game effort by her in Big 12 play. A real high-quality young person, we have a great deal of respect for her.

Q. Both for Kari and Ashley, Kansas State always seems to play good, fundamental, throw-back basketball. Is that something that you learn as a small-town Kansas girl or is that something you're taught?

ASHLEY SWEAT: I think it has to do with what we're taught growing up. I can tell you from our high school experiences, here at Kansas State we pride ourselves on staying fundamental and executing, working the small things. And I think that's what has won us games this year and hopefully will win us more.

KARI KINCAID: I agree with what Ashley said and I think our coaches take pride in helping us get better. And we're the type of players that want to come in and learn and get better.

I feel like I wouldn't be playing basketball if I didn't learn those fundamentals, because I have to use my strength. And part of that is what I know about the game, because I'm not the athlete that a lot of these girls are. I think our coaches take pride in making us better.

Q. Ashley, especially inside the last couple of games, Marlies is scoring again. What does that do for this team because there was a stretch where not much was coming from her offensively.

ASHLEY SWEAT: I think that's huge for us, anytime we can get a couple of players to score, even just 10 points, especially on the inside, that opens things up for the outside. You see Marlies establishing things from the inside.

And then Kari can step outside and get shots, and I think when we're firing on all cylinders, it can be a dangerous combination.

Q. Ashley, you guys just played Colorado, it seems like yesterday you just played them in Boulder. And coaches talk about the third time around and it can be tough, but it wasn't that way at all. Can you talk about how you guys took control of this game from the tip?

ASHLEY SWEAT: I definitely think anytime you're going to play a team three times, it's going to be tough. We've done the same thing with Iowa State the past two years, and I think today we came out and were focused on our execution and focusing on our scout and staying true to how we've played 'em the last couple of times.

I think our coaches have us so well prepared, you can see that as our third game, you know, that we've played them.

Q. Brittany Spears only had three points in the first half, was she a point of emphasis for your defense?

KARI KINCAID: Definitely, Spears, we

know, is an All-Big 12 player. She is great inside and out, and we brought total respect to her game and, you know, we know that she is looking to score and she did in the second half. We know who she was going into this game, but we knew all the other players, too.

Q. Do you think part of Colorado's problem was they only had two players who were looking to score today?

ASHLEY SWEAT: I think this is one of those games where they felt like all year they've carried the team and done such a great job.

Colorado is a great basketball team and having Spears and Richards on the inside, they do a bulk of the playing, but their guards do a lot of other things. They play great defense and Smith is a great shooter.

They bring a lot to the game, and I think toward the end of the season you're seeing more of a postgame on the inside.

Q. Ashley, and Kari, you guys played on March 1 against Texas A&M, and that was a pretty tough game for you guys. I know Shalin was under the weather then. What do you guys have to do different tomorrow, maybe you two individually and what you think you have to do as a team against them?

ASHLEY SWEAT: I think the last time we played them, I don't know if we were mentally ready for the challenge. That's a huge thing for our team, if we can get ourselves fired up, we play on a lot of emotion. That's what drives this team.

I think if we can come out with the fire and intensity that we've had the past three games, we can be successful. We need to play together and execute, and obviously I think that hopefully there will be a better turn out than last time.

KARI KINCAID: I agree, but we're going to have to play our best game to beat a team like Texas A&M, and we know that. They come in and play their hearts out every single game, and that's something we have to match and exceed if we have a chance to win.

Q. Deb, same question I asked the girls. You take a lot of pride in that you've built such a successful program at K-State, using mostly Kansas girls.

COACH PATTERSON: We've been unbelievably privileged to have hard-working, Kansas talent over the years. And like every

program in this league, your program tends to have a signature style with which they play.

Our Kansas talent has really given us the opportunity in our successful years, I think, to shine and to be successful, and competitive in this league and nationally. So all credit to them.

Also, you know, the commitment that they have to making the very most of their abilities and the foundation that they have coming out of AAU ball and high school basketball.

Obviously we're attracted to fundamental, hard-nosed, tough players, very much like you might find at an Iowa State or Nebraska. So it's just a tribute to them. And I think our style will continue to remain the same and our system, as I think all of the Big 12 programs by and large are successful, remaining true to who they are and how they want to play.

Q. Talk about the rebounding, especially the offensive rebounding in the second half and getting the chances.

COACH PATTERSON: I thought coming off the floor with about eight was significant for us. It's an aspect in tournament play that you have to bring to the floor.

We were active there, we didn't rely on one shot and out, which at times when you're a team that tends to rely on offensive execution and the finish of a play, you can get tempted to not put your nose to the grind stone offensively. And offensive rebounds are so much at times about athletic instincts and athletic skills.

And we're not always so great in that area, and our kids worked hard to get the opportunities to rebound. That was big in the first half, our rebounds and opportunities and second and third possessions, whether we converted or not was very, very big.

Q. How much -- is it an advantage or disadvantage to have to play the first day, go into the second day since you have momentum under your belt, Texas A&M coming in cold. Is that an advantage or is it tougher having to play the extra game?

COACH PATTERSON: I don't look at it as any tougher for us than anybody. You earn your way into this tournament, and we had this opportunity today to compete hard. And I thought our kids competed well, and now the reality is it's just all about the next opponent.

And we know we're facing a great one with Texas A&M, and someone that took us to school the first time we played 'em. So that's the unbelievable challenge of Big 12 play. And I think it's just a testament to the quality of this league to think that in your second-round game, you're playing the No. 8 team in the country.

Under the circumstances, unbelievable. And it speaks to the fact that this is a league that's had maybe seven and eight easy in the NCAA tournament. It's just that tough.

So we have all the respect in the world for Colorado, we're thrilled to have won this game and now we look ahead and go, wow! Texas A&M! I'm just proud of what we brought to the floor and hope we can build on it.

Q. Coach, Texas A&M has shown they're human a couple of times, but person-for-person are they the most difficult match-up for you in this league of anybody?

COACH PATTERSON: Well, they certainly proved the first time through that they could put a hurt on us, more so than anyone else in this league. They're playing just phenomenal basketball.

You look at their -- the fact that that's a program that tends to play very well down the stretch, you know, in late February and March. They matured into a program, and they have an offensive team to match the great defense they bring to the floor.

I think they're playing as well as anybody I've seen in this league. I know they had a tough game against Baylor down the stretch, but when you're playing at such a high level through the course of this league, and you lose a game against another top-10 opponent, you can tend to think, what a hiccup, and really it wasn't at all.

It's just that you were playing a top-10 opponent in Baylor, I think top 10. It's just that good of a league, great balance, Danielle Gant, Sydney Colson stepped up in our game and was an amazing freshman, Takia Starks, Tyra White, Tanisha Smith, you don't find a spot in their lineup that's weak, and that's why they're a top-10 program in the country.

It's amazing to think that, again, that's a team that didn't win our league because there are teams that were even better. They're great, they've been a tough match-up for us in our first game and we'll have to play significantly different and better than we did the first time to give it a good shot.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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