



**2015 NCAA
WOMEN'S
CHAMPIONSHIP**

**DIVISION I
BASKETBALL**

First Round · Ohio vs. Arizona State
Wells Fargo Arena · Tempe, Arizona
Saturday, March 21

FRIDAY PRESS CONFERENCE QUOTES – Arizona State

COACH THORNE: I'll just start by saying how appreciative we are of getting to be here, not only by being selected by the NCAA but our administration and our PAC-12 office arranging making it possible for us to host because a month ago it wouldn't have been possible. So we are so grateful to just get to be at home and be in the NCAA Tournament. We're very excited. This team has been amazing to coach all year long, just really mature and hard-working. We're kind of ready to play. It's just been two weeks. Right, guys? Yeah, so we'll just take questions.

Q. Promise and Sophie, last year you guys kind of had a rough ending to the PAC-12 season. How much, if any, effect did that have on your mindset, and how did it affect how you approached this year and your success this year?

PROMISE AMUKAMARA: I think it took a toll on us for the season. We knew how it felt getting knocked off the first -- well, our first -- well, it wasn't really the first round, but in our first game. We didn't want to be in that situation again. And so we worked hard in the off-season. People developed their skills, and I think we did a lot better this year.

SOPHIE BRUNNER: Yeah, how she was saying, I think we really took it to heart that we didn't do well in the PAC-12 tournament last year, and there was just a lot of motivation going into this season and knowing we would be better than last season and building on that, so that was our big motivation this year and doing the little things better and becoming more consistent as a team, so I think we've done a great job of that this year, so I think that's why we've had so much success.

Q. I'll start with Sophie. If nobody ever saw you play, how would you describe this team?

SOPHIE BRUNNER: I would describe us as really hard-working because if you problem I just look at us, we're not huge looking for anything like that. I think we play well together and that's why we succeed. That's our main ingredient to success is how we play together and our chemistry and how hard we work. If no one ever watched us play I would just say we're a hard-working team and that we make other people work harder for us, so if they're going to beat us they're going to have to work harder than us.

PROMISE AMUKAMARA: Yeah, just like Sophie said, we're a hard-working team, and we're a very tough team. We're never going to give up, and we're just going to fight for the whole 40 minutes of the game.

Q. Can each of you talk about what you've gained from the break, the benefits of having this break now, and then also what you think of Ohio and what you've learned about them in preparing for them?

PROMISE AMUKAMARA: I think during the two weeks we had off, I think it helped us get rid of all the little kinks and really prepare for the game plan we have going into these first and second rounds. Ohio is a great -- they're a great offensive team, and we're going to do our best trying to stop their three-point shots because they like shooting, and then just playing good defense as a whole and rebounding.

SOPHIE BRUNNER: Building on what promise said, I think we just got back to like focusing on what we need to do and not so much the other team, just getting back to working hard for every play and just getting back to like hard practices. I think that was good for us, just getting tough again and rebuilding that muscle. That was good, and then going into Ohio I think we're focusing on just Ohio right now, and obviously want to go past that, but we know we're going to be a really tough team and that they're good just like us. We know it's going to be hard and we're going to have to make them work for everything.

Q. Coach, is there any personality trait of this team that you've seen throughout this year that's something that stands out that's different than any other team you've coached?

COACH THORNE: Work. This team definitely stands out in my mind, and every team every year is different. Every team has a different personality, and obviously I think for this team, they're so young but yet they're so mature. They're so serious but yet they have fun. And I think, like I've had to do so little. They're usually like how do I make it fun. They make it fun for themselves and yet they show up focused and ready to get the job done. I think their maturity and their ability to balance enjoying the process as well as the hard grind of preparation has been maybe the best of any team I've ever coached, and I think that's truly exceptional for them.

Q. What's it mean to you two to be playing at home?

PROMISE AMUKAMARA: It means a lot to have the support system we have here at home, and then just like Charli says, we just so appreciate that our administration has -- they allow -- they made it possible for us to play here.

SOPHIE BRUNNER: Yeah, building off what Promise says, we really thank our administration and what the PAC-12 did to make this possible and allow us to play here and just the support we've gotten from ASU as a whole and the students just really means a lot.

Q. You guys played on the road last year. What do you think the difference will be having a home court, and the Curtain of Distraction at your game a couple of times. Does it make a difference for you guys like it has for the men?

PROMISE AMUKAMARA: Well, according to the statistics, I guess the Curtain of Distraction has made a huge impact in the free-throw percentage of our opponents, so hopefully that plays a role during our games. But like I said, we're just very appreciative to be playing here. Our support system is huge from ASU and we're just happy to play.

SOPHIE BRUNNER: Yeah, I think having the Curtain of Distraction will be cool. They've been at a couple of our games and it's worked out well. That'll be cool, and then just being able to play in front of our home crowd, I think will be a really cool experience, too. I think overall it will be a good experience, and we're just thankful for it.

Q. Promise, I was there on senior day, but how does this game feel different? You guys are hosting the tournament in your senior season, so how does this game feel different for you?

PROMISE AMUKAMARA: Well, first of all, since it's the NCAA Tournament, it makes all the difference. It's not like a normal home game, we're playing for so much more. This is for like the whole of our season, the National Championship. It's huge, and it's worth way more than my senior game.

Q. Promise, you mentioned their three-point shooting and that does seem to be a strength of theirs, but you guys have done a good job with three-point shooting and of course you're known for your defense. What do you do when you have a really good three-point shooting team to keep them from getting that going?

PROMISE AMUKAMARA: I think we just have to -- we all have to step up our pressure, make them put it on the court, and then it's not against -- it's not one-on-one, it's one against five. It's not going to be me against my opponent, it's going to be my opponent against myself and the rest of my team. We're just going to play great defense and try to get stops.

Q. What do you think about this group of coaches that are here for this sub-regional?

COACH THORNE: Well, obviously it is pretty -- it's very impressive, a couple Hall of Fame coaches in our sub-regional, which hopefully just makes the experience here, having the NCAA Tournament in Tempe, that much more inviting for our community to come out and watch because it's not just ASU and our Sun Devils, but we've got some great teams with some amazing coaches, which is usually the case in the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Can you expand a little bit about the description of this team, and did you see this coming when you first started practicing?

COACH THORNE: The "did you see this coming question," you know, basically I really -- we really believed that we would be better than we were last year. We had a good year last year, and we had a lot coming back, and we knew that we could get a lot better. We expected to build on last year's success. The consistency of this year's team has been amazing, and I don't know that I would have predicted it. Probably would have predicted us to have a few more letups or stumbling blocks. It didn't hurt that we stayed pretty healthy because then when we did lose Kelsey for about three weeks, other people stepped up and did an amazing job in her absence. We've already said it, but just how much they came together as a team and how hard they worked from the off-season and through November and even as we got into the season was why they were so consistent. I think we just have kids with big hearts that just are really competitive and passionate, and I know you might think that every athlete has that, but they don't. These kids are special that way. I mean, anything we ask them to do, they do, and a lot of times they'll come back and they'll want to do more. And when a coach has to shut her kids down instead of saying, hey, don't you want to do some more shooting, that's a great problem, and I think that's a little bit more along the lines of the character of this team. And it is character. We don't have an All-American -- we don't have necessarily a player that's going to take over every game or two players or three players like some of the best teams in the country do. So their ability to share the ball and take turns stepping up and just the essence -- the thing I keep saying, it's really the essence of teams. What everyone really loves about team sports, our team exemplifies. Tia Kanoa, Sophie, then we have other people that can step up and score and do things, and we've done that all year long.

Q. Can you talk a little bit more about what you've learned about Ohio?

COACH THORNE: I mean, Ohio is very good. In watching them, I'm wondering why they're a 14 seed, to be honest. But they've won 27 games, just like us, so they're a confident team that knows how to win. They know who they are and they play to their strengths really well. As Promise says, they love the three-point shot, but they're not just a three-point shooting team. They're kind of a three or key team. They're great at attacking the rim. They've got great penetrators, and when you cut them off, they keep their dribble and they find their teammates. They're a very good offensive team, and then they're a very good defensive team. They've been holding teams to in the 50s all year long. They play from the inside out, so it's more of that saggy match, sagging, switching. They know they're a little bit undersized, so they're going to just double and triple-team our post and they're going to work really hard to take away our paint touches, and if they beat us, they beat us from the outside. Like a lot of great teams, I think they kind of keep it simple, and what they do, they do really well. And when I say simple, I mean like they don't play five different defenses, they play one defense and they do it really well. They run their motion offense, and they run it really well.

Q. You talked this season about how well your team does in preparing for an opponent. I'm assuming that you would think that would be the case here, the time they've had to get ready?

COACH THORNE: Yeah, I think we've had good time to prepare. We'll be very -- I think we'll be very ready for what they do. I mean, we are preparing Wednesday because we took Tuesday off, so it's not like we've had an enormous amount of time, but we've certainly had the same amount of time in the Conference and everything to prepare for somebody. But I think we feel good about what we need to do to win, and it's a balance right now because we do -- we really want to be prepared for this team, and then we also just want to go out and kind of do what we do, so we're trying to balance that. There's no secrets anymore, it's just part of the season. In this day and age with technology, we have every single game. We pretty much know everything a team did. We should definitely be prepared.

Q. When you went into the postseason last year, into the NCAA last year, there were a lot of freshmen. What would you say are the main differences that this team is going to bring to this postseason?

COACH THORNE: Right. The only thing I'll say about Ohio, too, is they're different than any team we've played this year, so I think that makes it -- it is making it more challenging to prepare. Usually you play a team, you're like, oh, they're like this team, like Villanova, like Utah. This team -- we've played some five out but not quite with this personnel, so it is different and their motion is different, and they have some dribble-drive concepts but it's different. In terms of this team, what's different this year? I mean, it is a different team, but obviously the people that are making the plays, the majority of the minutes this year, are all returners, and I think it's that one extra year. With all that experience last year of kind of building on being the team to beat, building on we expect to win game in and game out, kind of reestablishing our winning tradition here at ASU and our team culture. So I feel like we got it back last year, but this year we really -- we didn't need to get it back; it was here. Now life is a lot easier when you've got your culture, your winning culture and you've got great relationships and you can just focus on basketball.

Q. I think if I've got this right, there's three basketball teams playing at home this week?

COACH THORNE: Four.

Q. What does that say about your conference?

COACH THORNE: Thank you. Yeah, we have four teams in our conference that are getting to host this weekend, and I think it speaks volumes to the strength of the PAC-12 this year. I think we finished the regular season with four in the national rankings, too, which speaks to something. I think a lot of that is -- we've always been a great conference, but I think it's really helped with the PAC-12 Network. Having the PAC-12 network has allowed people across the country to watch us, and so I feel like our teams and our players are getting a lot more respect now than we did when we were only having a few games on TV, and we were waiting until the NCAA Tournament, and they were like, oh, they're pretty good, and people didn't see them enough, and now they're seeing them. So I think that has really allowed for a lot more recognition and respect.

Q. You've gotten good production off your bench from at least four players, and then Shaq has been doing some nice things for you lately. Is she ready to -- in key situations here if you needed her, Shaq to come in and help you, just because of the extra size she gives you?

COACH THORNE: Absolutely. Ohio is a tough match-up. I'm just stating the obvious for her with five out, they're playing virtually no true posts, everybody is playing on the perimeter the whole game. But I think Shaq, Ayanna Edwards, has really come on strong at the end of the season. We've put her in in big games in key situations, and she's performed well, so we have confidence in her, and depending on the situation and the match-ups, we absolutely will utilize her. Nicole Iademarco, she missed a few months with a broken hand. She's gradually gotten back and playing better and better and with a four-guard lineup, maybe we can go -- we're already pretty small, but we could go a little smaller, too, and she's been progressing, as well.