

March 11, 2015



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An Interview With:



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by San Jose State.

Coach, some thoughts on today's game.

COACH CRAIGHEAD: Tremendously hard-fought game by both teams. Boise State made plays down the stretch. Hit shots when they needed to. We didn't have as much in the tank to answer.

But extremely proud of our players and our team, and these seniors right here who have carried us. I'm really going to miss coaching them.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. After a remarkable run and exciting two days, what do you take from this and what did you say to your teammates in the locker room?

REBECCA WOODBERRY: We just encourage each other, told each other we did a good job and fought during the game and everybody put out good effort.

TA'REA CUNNIGAN: You know, you don't want to let the younger ones see you with your head down. Especially we do have a younger group coming in. We have some sophomores, some juniors and a couple redshirts as well.

Just telling the juniors who will be seniors, you know, when the time comes around again, just be ready, have the same drive and have the same fight.

Q. With the expectation so high with some of the other teams, you being able to do what you did leading into today, what did you learn about yourselves and about your teammates?

TA'REA CUNNIGAN: You know, after having kind of not the season we wanted to have, being able to come to the tournament, piecing things together, setting new school records, being a part of this is a great feeling.

Not really discouraged right now. More so excited that we made it this far, especially when people said that we couldn't. Just enjoying the feeling right now.

Q. I know the game just ended, but can you reflect on the four years you had at San Jose State.

TA'REA CUNNIGAN: It's been a great four years. I'm really, really glad that I chose to come to San Jose. Accomplished a lot of things personally and also as a team as well.

I decided to come to San Jose to turn a program around and to be a part of something greater than myself. I feel like I definitely was able to accomplish that being here. Even with the coaching changes, I was glad. I was sad to see them go, but glad to see who came.

Just really appreciated everything that was done for me. Just glad of the things that I was able to give back to San Jose as well.

Q. Looked like it was a tough day shooting from the outside. Like yesterday, teams were manning up on you. Was that the case today?

REBECCA WOODBERRY: You could say that. I think we struggled on spacing sometimes. But, yes, they were playing me pretty tight, as usual.

Q. This game looked like it turned in the last four minutes. They started to score inside, get passes inside. What were the

defensive breakdowns? Seemed like most of the game you were in control.

TA'REA CUNNIGAN: I would say playing three games back-to-back, that's pretty challenging, especially after playing the No. 1 seed being the second game. Just a little bit of fatigue just kind of at the end, you know, got the best of us.

Q. During that late surge they had, did it kind of become surreal when you started seeing them take a page out of your book from the last two days?

TA'REA CUNNIGAN: Not necessarily, you know, because we didn't have anything to lose going into the game. It wasn't any pressure going into this game. We came in as the eight seed. We came here ready to battle, ready to fight despite our seeding.

I didn't see it as them taking anything away from us. I just watched my career come to a nice conclusion.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies.

We'll continue with questions for Coach Craighead.

Q. As tough as that loss had to be to swallow, especially with it coming down to the end, you have to be proud of the effort they put forth and the excitement they brought to the building the first three days of this event.

COACH CRAIGHEAD: Definitely. They've battled from the first tip we had. I think it was a long week for us. I thought that they stayed sharp and focused on the first two game plans. You could see some mental fatigue today at the end, thought there were some breakdowns.

But, man, they sure gave it everything they had.

Q. Coming in as the eight seed, there's a big challenge there facing the number one seed. What did you learn about yourself and about your program?

COACH CRAIGHEAD: About the program itself, I've always felt like we were a scrappy team, that we kind of underachieved in the conference this season. We probably felt like we were a four seed and really underachieved throughout the year.

So in coming into the tournament as an eight seed, we didn't care who we matched up with. We thought we could beat anybody. Boise State had more in the tank tonight. They made

plays when they had to make plays. They're a very good basketball team.

As a coach, I'm pretty young in my career. I've been in these moments before. Just I learned a lot about my players that are returning, how much I can challenge them, what we're going to try to accomplish next season and in the future of this program.

We got to send off our seniors on a very high note. They feel very good about how their career is ending. That's not always the case. I feel really good as a coach for that.

Q. Even though the season ends 20 minutes ago, is this something to feed off of, to already start getting ready and use as a motivational tool for the younger players?

COACH CRAIGHEAD: Definitely, I didn't want to overload them after the game. In the same moment that you want them to be excited about the win, you have to let them feel the loss. There's some hurt feelings in that locker room.

We'll get back to San Jose and just let them enjoy the rest of their time here and just together as a team. Those younger kids, they know. They watch. They saw the older kids. They want to make sure when they finish this thing it's in the NCAA tournament at some point while they're here.

Q. A lot of shots that went down the last two days didn't go down today it looked like by inches. Is it tough to keep the ladies motivated when they were making the shot yesterday?

COACH CRAIGHEAD: There's no lack of motivation in those guys because they still had the guts to take the shots. You don't want to make excuses. That's not what I'm doing here. But obviously when you miss by inches, you can just see the fatigue.

Then obviously if you make those shots, maybe the adrenaline and the emotion carries you through to the end of the game.

Boise State did what they had to do. We give them the credit.

Q. It also looked like in the second half there were some missed free throw opportunities to push the lead out or cut the lead down. Is that, again, the fatigue?

COACH CRAIGHEAD: Yeah, I mean, I

would think so. At the same time it's a big moment that they're in. There's more nerves. You're playing in the semifinal game, two games away from the NCAA tournament you've probably been dreaming about since you were a little kid. It's all of it combined.

I think when Ta'Rea started struggling in the first half, our players watch her, and they watch her closely. She was frustrated at times. I just tried to remind her to have fun, don't worry about this.

Q. The last three games that you won, it seemed like the bus ride over to the arena, the ladies were laughing, joking. The bus ride over today was dead silent. Do you think they finally realized, Hey, maybe we can do this, they got a little bit nervous?

COACH CRAIGHEAD: I didn't think we started the game tight at all. I actually didn't. I thought we got tight at the end when we saw it slipping away from us. They were focused.

When we got into the locker room, I heard chatter. I sat up there thinking, Why are these guys are so quiet? They were goofy, no matter what.

It's tough to do what we were trying to do at an eight seed. There's quality teams in this tournament, in this conference. We already knocked off number one.

Q. Now is one of the goals to get in that top five and avoid three games in a row?

COACH CRAIGHEAD: That's always got to be the goal. I mean, that's always got to be the goal. That extra day helps. Especially today we couldn't press. I was looking at them and I thought we needed to pressure. I think we would have just given up baskets if we would have tried to do that.

Q. You're losing a lot of scoring with T and with Becca. Were you happy to see Aniya stepped up? Tonight didn't have a great night with nine points, but the game last night, you have to find some scoring. Is it good to see that she can step up and play that, too?

COACH CRAIGHEAD: Absolutely. It's really good to look around the conference and everybody else is losing people, too. We lose people, everyone losing somebody. UNLV loses players. Boise State loses players. We all lose players.

They've been tremendous scorers. Becca in just two years has really climbed the charts from

the three-point standpoint, and Ta'Rea obviously is huge. But we'll be fine.

Q. Talk a little bit about Riana Byrd. Didn't have a ton of points tonight, working on the rebounds, rejecting six shots --

COACH CRAIGHEAD: I thought it was seven.

Q. She played the same way against Colorado State and didn't get the recognition. How did she play in this tournament?

COACH CRAIGHEAD: I've been asking her to be our defensive anchor in the halfcourt for weeks. She really stepped up over the last two weeks. She's been great. She snatches defensive rebounds. She blocks shots. She's a calming effect for our players when she's on the court because she's a pretty headsy basketball player, knows what's going on.

Q. This team struggles at home. How important was it to go on the road, win three in a row, play Boise State down to the last second, how much confidence does that give the team going ahead?

COACH CRAIGHEAD: I hope it gives them confidence. You hope that's a growth thing and we don't take a step backwards. It's a long season still until we get back to that place. We have an off-season. You want to see programs take steps in the right direction and that's definitely one.

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