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Oklahoma – 4
Tennessee – 0

An interview with:

**OKLAHOMA HEAD COACH
PATTY GASSO
KEILANI RICKETTS
LAUREN CHAMBERLAIN
JESSICA SHULTS
MICHELLE GASCOIGNE
BRIANNA TURANG**

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Oklahoma head coach Patty Gasso and student-athletes Lauren Chamberlain, Michelle Gascoigne, Keilani Ricketts, Jessica Shults, and Brianna Turang. We'll start with Coach and go to the floor for questions.

COACH GASSO: I need you guys to be patient with me, because I need to say some things, and normally I'm pretty short with this, but I will tell you why this happened. One year ago we watched another team celebrate right in front of us, and we, as a team prayed together and thanked God for the opportunity to be in a National Championship and knew that this was something that we needed to learn from.

When that last out was recorded, all of a sudden the Sooners were supposed to be the team to beat. It's very difficult to live that way. But this team is resilient, and we followed God's lead. We followed it. We followed the path, and it was windy at times, but we never stepped off; and we just did it together. I cannot express to you how proud I am. We absolutely give God the glory in this victory.

I'd like to thank the All Sports Association, the University of Oklahoma, the great University of Oklahoma, all the workers at the Hall of Fame Stadium, all of the volunteers, the NCAA, for putting on a wonderful show. We were very, very

pleased to represent the University of Oklahoma as well as the state of Oklahoma.

You've heard a lot about it this week, and that is who we were representing, not the phrases more than, more than ourselves. We had a lot of people we wanted to give pride to, make happy and just forget about things that have been going on in the last three weeks or so.

I cannot tell you how honored I am to be the coach of this team because they're just special, and they know how to win; and they fought, and they were never afraid. They bowed up when they needed to together, and they're just a tremendous group of athletes that I love to work with every day.

I told them, if I had a million dollars, I would buy this for you, but I don't have a million dollars so I'm glad that we won it instead. Just couldn't be more pleased. Seeing these seniors go out this way is something that I'll cherish forever.

Q. Patty, can you talk about your decision to go with Michelle today and the adjustments you made in the lineup? It seemed that every move you made really worked out and the team responded to it.

COACH GASSO: Well, I know Coach Lombardi got together with Keilani and Michelle, and we talked a little about what we were going to do today. And Keilani was right on. Let's do it. Michelle's ready and I'm ready for her if she needs me. Just like Michelle has been ready for me if I needed her. It was also pretty coincidental that Keilani hit the home run to allow Michelle a little bit of breathing room.

So these two seniors, along with Shults and Turang, what a tremendous, tremendous group from the moment they stepped on campus. All I know is we had to find a way to win them a National Championship, and man, what a special group. That's really come down to really wanting to make sure that these guys were with us on the page. We all thought alike about it and said, 'Yes, let's do it.'

Q. Keilani, can you talk about how strange it was not to be out there? You've pitched every big game for the last two years. Was it a strange feeling, and how much was that helped by the fact that Michelle never got in any trouble? From a pitching standpoint, it was a breeze?

KEILANI RICKETTS: It wasn't too much of a strange feeling because Michelle's had tremendous success all year long. She's taken on some great teams and we wouldn't be in this game without her. Just to be able to help her out means a lot because she's been a great teammate for us. She's really just been a leader for us. To just get her some support, it's awesome to give her any more momentum she needs.

Q. You've got arguably the best two-way player in maybe the last decade, and the decision maybe your conviction to go with Michelle instead of her in this big game setting? I know you said, Keilani said she's a great teammate and put up fantastic numbers, but to not go with Keilani?

COACH GASSO: Well, Keilani threw 188 pitches last night, and that had a lot to do with it as well. But Michelle has been such a huge part of getting our team to this point. To give her this opportunity was a big moment for her, and what I love is that Keilani was right there with it saying, 'Yeah, go ahead. Let's do this and to share the moment together.'

Keilani has had a ton of big moments, and the fact that she was wanting to share this with Michelle, I think probably helped Michelle get on the mound and say, I've got this. Let me do this for us. And, man, what a phenomenal game that Michelle threw who has not thrown in any of the postseason. Couldn't be on a bigger stage. Michelle stood on the mound and won a National Championship.

Q. Michelle, can you talk about this game? I mean, you haven't started a game since May 11th, and then she throws you into game 2 for the national title. Were you freaked out? What were your thoughts leading up to all of that?

MICHELLE GASCOIGNE: I only found out about three hours before the game, but I was excited. After Coach Lombardi told me, we had to watch film, the pitchers, and adjust. Just with knowing that Keilani was all for it and she was

supporting me and she was going to be in the bullpen if I needed her just brought me all the confidence in the world. I know my teammates trust me, and that is something that I've always taken out on the mound with me. It's really carried me through this whole season just knowing that they trust me and we've got each other's back.

Q. Michelle, your reward for throwing a shutout in the National Championship game was you were at the bottom of the dog pile. What was that like? I'm wondering if you were like, holy cow, I'm at the bottom of this thing or what? Or were you not feeling anything?

MICHELLE GASCOIGNE: It was pretty unreal. It was really exciting to be on the bottom. It's just like something you dream about your whole life, and we've never dog piled before, because we've always just been waiting for this moment. And we said we're not doing it until we get the whole thing. It was pretty cool being down there. I think my arm had the circulation being cut off, but I did not care. I did not care.

Q. Jessica, last year, a year ago, you were such a team leader when you came in and spoke for the team and said, hey, we'll work hard over the off-season and get back in here. Now a year later you're the national champions. Can you talk about your emotions and what you think about this whole process a year later now that you're holding the trophy?

JESSICA SHULTS: It's just like Michelle said, it's unreal that we're here. But I feel like last year really gave us the determination to get back in this moment and get back with this team. We all believed in each other. We all worked so hard all year long. We knew it was going to be a day by day thing. Not to take anything for granted, just work together and trust in what we have and trust what our coaches have been telling us all along will work.

Q. Coach and some of the underclassmen, could you talk about how the senior leadership has affected both the underclass and gotten you here specifically with Keilani and Jessica?

COACH GASSO: Well, I think Keilani is a natural leader by her ability on the mound and her intensity and what she does there; everybody seems to follow her lead. Jessica Shults has been

our captain for the last two years, and she has got quite an infectious personality that just makes you want to play around her and be better.

So the fact that Jessica Shults is holding a National Championship trophy will always be something that I cherish, because I didn't know that she was going to play again. So they've been special.

LAUREN CHAMBERLAIN: This class had a big part of the reason why I chose to go to the University of Oklahoma, and I thank them for that. You guys are so awesome. You really changed the face of this program, and you've made me proud to keep playing here. I'm going to hold it down for you. I love you guys.

Q. For the four of you, can you each give a statement on what it means to go out as a senior with a National Championship?

MICHELLE GASCOIGNE: It's everything I've ever dreamed of. It really hasn't sunk in yet, but us four have been so strong and so close for four years and we've gone through everything together. And I said before the game, first pitch to the last, let's do this. So it's everything I could ask for.

KEILANI RICKETTS: It means the world to be able to have that National Championship for our senior year. Because we've had a lot of high points throughout our careers, but this is definitely the highest. I think we've built our way up to this point. Just to see these three girls have a tremendous year so far and for their senior year to go out so strong is awesome.

JESSICA SHULTS: This is what you dream about your entire life. I wouldn't want to do it with any other seniors by my side. We came in here like a goof ball bunch and now we've matured and we're leaving as women, as Coach would want it.

BRIANNA TURANG: It's amazing. Like Jessica said, I wouldn't choose another group to play with. We've been so close, and we've gone through so much together. It's been a blast to get to play with them. I mean, this whole team has the biggest heart, the most strength, and the most fight in any team that I've ever played for. It's amazing to be able to play with these girls.

Q. Lauren, how surprised were you to see something to hit today, especially after last night and even throughout this series?

LAUREN CHAMBERLAIN: I don't really think about that too much. If they're going to pitch



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to me, I'm ready to hit. I was excited when I was seeing the ball in the zone, so, yeah, I was happy.

Q. You've seen a lot of great, great players over the years, over the decades. Where does Keilani fit? Where does she rank? I know how coaches love to compare players, but she's one of the greats, isn't she, of all time?

COACH GASSO: Oh, absolutely. I can't compare her to anybody. Being able to work with her every day makes me know her a little bit more as well. So, to me, she is definitely one of the greatest of all time in this sport. And you know what? This kid has been living with that for a while, and it's been wearing on her. I think you can now say you are.

Q. Keilani and Brianna, could you both talk about -- Patty talked about sort of the weight you felt after last season going into this season knowing you were the favorite and you needed to win and make up for last year, that kind of thing. Can you talk about a whole year of carrying that responsibility and how it affected you particularly in this tournament and what it feels like that you did fulfill the expectations?

KEILANI RICKETTS: After last year's national championship game, it definitely gave us one of the most painful feelings I'm sure all of us have ever felt. We just accepted the fact that God didn't want us to win it that year. It wasn't our time. That just gave us so much drive and determination to get back to this moment. We knew that we were the favorite all year, and it was cool just because we weren't able to feel any of that pressure because we were able to go out there and have fun with each other. Just the fact that our lineup has so much depth with the pitching and the hitting. It makes it even more relaxing out there. It's easier to not press.

BRIANNA TURANG: Just like Keilani said, I guess that's probably the worst place you want to be, to make it that far to the national championship game and losing. But we definitely used that to jump start for the season. But we tried to not let that bother us, just keep moving forward and keep fighting, and keeping the faith. It was a great journey, and I wouldn't choose another team to do it with.

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