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An interview with:

COACH BLUDER

COACH BLUDER: Obviously, the team is excited about the Michigan win. It was our first time to get a top 25 true road win. We've gotten our top 25 wins on our home court, on neutral courts. But, to get the road win, I think was really good for our confidence going on the road.

Playing at Illinois this week is going to be one tough basketball game. They are an aggressive team. You have to keep your composure. I think Sam's going to be big for us in that, just because she did such a great job in the Michigan game keeping her composure, and the rest of the team fed off that. And Illinois just banks on the fact that you're going to panic in their traps and in their pressure defense.

So I think keeping the composure and taking care of the ball is really important against Illinois. This is a team that is, I think, going to make some real big damage in the Big Ten Conference. They've already got four road wins in the Big Ten, including Minnesota where they scored 91 points and then versus Ohio State.

They took Purdue to overtime, and Purdue only won that game by one point, and Michigan State only won that game by four points against Illinois. So Illinois is knocking on everyone's door right now. I expect it's going to be an intense game the whole time there because that's the way that they play.

But in saying that, our team feels good about playing at Illinois. We've won seven straight now at Illinois. We've done very well in Champagne, and any time you feel good about a place, I think that helps your psyche going in there. I think our team is in a good place right now, but we know this is going to be a very tough battle.

We've got a target on our back now getting into the top 25. And we like to play against top 25 teams, so we have to understand that being

ranked in the top 25 now carries some added pressure that we're going to have to withstand.

Q. Can you talk about composure? Your top six players all have a lot of experience. Do you think that helps them? They don't seem to get rattled.

COACH BLUDER: I think having experienced players that have been in that situation before time and time again. They've been on the court so many times. Think of how many games that Morgan and Jaime have been a part of, that's pretty important for us.

So I think definitely the experience helps in this situation.

Q. Can you talk about the growth of Sam Logic, and her growth so far as a sophomore and becoming one of the Big Ten's best in assists?

COACH BLUDER: Sam is sixth best in the country right now in assists. I mean, the kid would rather have a pass than a score. It's so seldom anymore for a player to play the game and would rather pass the ball than score the ball. You just don't find kids like that anymore.

But what I also like about Sam is you give her a challenge, and she's going to step up and meet it. For example, last week, we gave her the job of guarding Kate Thompson who really hurt us in the first half at our place as a Michigan player. We gave her the challenge. And she had one field goal, and that was in our zone.

Sam loves a challenge. She loves to step up to that, and she's going to have a challenge, again, in this Illinois game. It used to be when you played Illinois you could bank on that they weren't going to score too many points, but now this is a different Illinois team. They've always been a really good defensive team. But now they're scoring as well, and that's what makes them a lot tougher this year than they have been in past years.

Q. Why is that? I mean, it's the same



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personnel in a lot of ways.

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, but this is a different system that he's running that really suits them. Because they are so athletic and they have such long wing spans, that his system is really very good for what the players are that are at Illinois.

So I think he's just letting them -- and they have no pressure. New coaching staff coming in there. Their two best players are seniors. They've been in the starting lineup since their coming to Illinois as well. So they've got experiences like we do with Jaime and Morgan. They have that same type of experience there with Karisma and Adrienne as well.

Q. Illinois is 4-0 on the road, 0-3 at home. How do you explain that?

COACH BLUDER: You know, it's strange. But sometimes you have to look at the opponents that they're playing against. They played Purdue at home, they played Michigan State at home, and Northwestern was kind of the weird one. They split with them, winning at Northwestern and losing at home.

But I think, again, it's who you're playing. Purdue is tough. Michigan State is a very good basketball team. So they lost those two games very close margins. Could have gone either way. So I think that it's really the competition more than a stigma of I'm playing better on the road.

Q. Is this one of the most complete teams that you've had? You've got size inside, you've got a distributor, you've got a bench?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, you said it exactly right. I think we do. We have all the parts that you need in a good, competitive basketball team. We have good height. We have a great inside presence with Morgan, and Bethany keeps getting better and better. We have a very good point guard that's leading us, and we've got three-point shooters. So I do think we have all the components to make a very good basketball team.

Q. What was your reaction when you found out that you were in the Top 25?

COACH BLUDER: I haven't seen the whole team yet. We have practice after this. Yesterday was our day off. We did have a captains meeting yesterday, and I met with our three captains, which are our three seniors, and they were really excited. I talked to them about now you understand you're going to have a target

on your back? And they welcomed it. They were excited about it.

I'm hoping what this does is bring them confidence because they've worked hard for this and they deserve it. But we also know we're only as good as that next game and winning that next game.

Q. Odd that it took that long, don't you think? Why do you think it took that long?

COACH BLUDER: I think we were ready to bust in there when we played Michigan on our home court. I think if we had won that game versus Michigan, we would have been there. But we've always had a little trouble getting respect. And I think Aaron Blau has done a great job for us as our SID getting the word out to AP voters. You have to have something good to spread the news about, and I think we've finally put together a good resume.

Q. What do you want to get done and what do you have to get done before tournament time?

COACH BLUDER: You know, there are so many things that I think we can get better at. I think we can continue to get better in our defense. Our defense is a lot better than it was last year. Our rebounding is a little better than it was last year, but I think we can always still get better in those situations.

Our offense at times flows nicely, but I think we can still get better in our offense. I think we can become more smooth in our offense. So I think there are a lot of area that's we can improve on.

I am so happy with Bethany Doolittle's improvement and what she's made in the last two weeks. I think she's made the greatest strides in the last weeks than any player on our basketball team. She not only had her career-high scoring of 19 against Michigan, but we gave her the opportunity to guard Rachel Sheffer, and Rachel Sheffer had a career high against us with 26 points. And Bethany held her to zero points. That impressed me even more than the offensive side of things.

So Bethany is becoming more aggressive. We've asked her to be more assertive, and she's stepped up and done it. I'm very pleased with the way she's playing because it takes a lot of burden off Morgan, too.

Q. What about Jaime Printy outside of scoring?

COACH BLUDER: In the last game, I sent her a text after watching the film of the Michigan game because there were so many times that she was helping on defense. That's not a statistic. It's not going to show up in the record books or in the highlight films, but there are so many times she had great help.

There was one possession where she had three help opportunities within one possession of play where Jaime helped, recovered, helped, recovered. That's not easy to do, and she did a super job of that.

She is a really good person to double team. What we call choke the post or double the post. She's very, very good at that. I think that's something she does that people don't recognize how good she is at that.

Q. That comes with time, obviously. What about leadership? Does she sense that it's winding down and this is her opportunity?

COACH BLUDER: Well, leadership, she is a captain on our team. The three seniors are captains, Morgan, Jaime and Trisha. We actually talked about that yesterday in our captains meeting, because you don't understand how quickly time goes when you're young. When you get to be our age, you understand it so much better, and you value it. But when you're in college, you think you have all this time ahead of you and playing-wise, you just don't.

We actually tried to make an example of that. And coach Jensen had a great example of that with marbles in the bowl, and how many days we had left of practice or being together, and each day the kids take a marble out and they're seeing that dwindle down. It's a great demonstration of how quickly the season is going. The seniors brought it up and said how meaningful that was to them because they could see how quickly the year was passing, and they don't want it to go quickly.

Q. Was there ever a time when you thought Bethany wasn't going to make it as a power forward?

COACH BLUDER: No I don't know that I thought she wasn't going to make it. I just thought there was more than she was giving us. I just think she's more athletic than people realize. She's a better shooter than people give her credit for. I think her problem was she came in here and she's deferring to everybody. She's like, oh, I've got

Jaime. I've got Sam. I've got Morgan. I don't need to score. Well, we wanted her to be part of that scoring. And I think she was just letting Morgan do her thing and really kind of playing a role player as a starter. We kind of talked about that with her how she can change that, and she has.

Q. What do you do with her next year? Leave her at the power forward, or do you put Bethany back at the 5?

COACH BLUDER: I've given that a little thought, but not a lot of thought. And both those options are a reality. That really depends how far Kayla continues to develop. If Kayla continues to develop as she is right now we could leave her at the 5 and Beth at the 4. Going into this year, we thought this was going to be a one-year thing, and that Beth would be moving back to the 5. I think it really depends on our depth next year at each position. But it's nice to know that you can use her at either one now. That lets us have a lot more versatility.

Q. It seemed like the first shot in games was like an 18-footer a lot of times?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, she's taken some quick shots that we don't think are maybe the highest percentage shots. We'd rather her wait a little longer. I know exactly what you're talking about. It comes down sometimes out of the trail, people are sagging off of her, so she takes that shot with maybe 25 seconds of the shot clock.

We talk about our team about good shot selection. Maybe we can get that same shot with 8 seconds, so why not get a better one first, and I think she's learning that.

Also another situation that she learned from -- it was a home game, I think. I don't know if it was Purdue or Wisconsin where she got an offensive rebound, puts up a fairly contested four-foot shot, gets fouled, and makes one of her free throws instead of bringing the ball out to work the clock because this was the last three or four minutes of the game.

Michigan, same scenario. Minute-and-a-half left in the game, she gets the offensive rebound. She went right back out with it. Those are small things. But, again, clock management and remembering what to do in crunch situations is pretty important. So she learned her lesson from that the first time from film

and did the right thing in the Michigan game.

Q. In what ways can Sam grow her game?

COACH BLUDER: I think she can always improve her shooting. I think she is a fine three-point shooter. She's not a great three-point shooter. And I love it when all of our guards can really hit threes, and nobody can be sagged off of defensively or not play strongly on the perimeter.

So I think she can continue to become a better offensive player with the three-point range. I think she's a very good passer now, a good rebounder. Defensively, she'll play whatever position we need her to play.

I think that would be a main thing for me and something that Sam's worked hard on. She did a good job of this in the Michigan game in just keeping her composure. Not getting upset with the officials. Sometimes she gets upset in those situations and kind of starts talking to officials too much, and that's my job. I think she's starting to understand that a little better.

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