

February 1, 2011



An Interview With:

COACH BLUDER

COACH BLUDER: Well, obviously this is a pretty important week for us playing at Purdue, a place that we haven't had a lot of success at. In fact, in my 10 years here, we have never won there and it would be great to get that monkey off our backs.

Purdue, we only play them one time this year. They are right behind us in the standings. So if it comes down to a tie, it's whoever wins this one game that will move up in the tiebreaker. So it puts a little added importance on this game since we don't get to play them in our home court.

Purdue plays much better on their home court than they do away from their home court. I guess could you say that about a lot of people, but I think it's really apparent with Purdue.

I love their point guard. She's a freshman. She reminds me so much of Kamille Wahlin. Shoots the three well. Just very mature for a freshman, running the team without hesitation, just lots of confidence. She is a very good player and is actually their leading scorer in Big Ten play.

Brittany Rayburn, not shooting the ball as well this year as she has in the past, but she has always hurt us. Especially at their place, she's done a lot of damage to us. So good player. Obviously, one of the better players in our league.

Drey Mingo is back. Kind of a strange situation when she was out for a while. They went 1-3 when she was out, so obviously very important for their team that she's back in the lineup and playing well. She's actually the third-leading scorer on their team, so that was a big loss when she was out for those four games.

Again, it's an important game for us and then we come home and play Penn State on Sunday, leaders in the Big Ten Conference, we

lost at their place, but we have an opportunity to have them at our house now.

This is our last Sunday game. We are battling Super Bowl parties, but hopefully people will understand they can come to our game and then still have the opportunity to go over and have their Super Bowl parties.

It's 'Go Red For Women Day'. I don't own any red. So I don't know if I'll be participating, but I will have a red pin on for that cause. There are a thousand free tickets at MidWestOne Banks, so they have been a great supporter of this. I understand there's not many left but it's really great of MidWestOne to support a program like that, so very appreciative of it.

Q. Ever able to get that tip-off changed on Sunday?

COACH BLUDER: No, we were not able to, I think part of it was because they had presold the tickets to MidWestOne and such. So the administration decided it was best to keep it at two o'clock.

Q. What is the worst travel situation you've had since you've been at Iowa? Have you ever had games postponed? It could get dicey.

COACH BLUDER: We have not had any games postponed. We have had trouble getting home from trips before. My first year we got stuck at Michigan State and had to fly out of Detroit the next day. Coming out of Northwestern a few years back, our plane was cancelled and we tried to bus it. And we got to outside of Chicago, the western suburb of Chicago, and pulled into a hotel because there was no way we were going to get home that night.

Those are, you know -- coming from the Big Ten Tournament was not a whole lot of fun last year because of the fog. We had to land in Chicago and drive from there but we have never

missed a game due to weather.

Q. Any dicey flights?

COACH BLUDER: You know, a lot of recruiting crazy stories but not too bad with the team, not too bad, nothing crazy. Going into Penn State is always interesting if it's windy, just because of the mountains there, it makes it for a very bumpy ride. We have had a few people lose it in the plane a couple of times in those situations. But nothing that we felt like we were threatened.

Q. What are your thoughts on this game? Are you kind of open-ended if they said, let's fly out in three hours, would you get up and go?

COACH BLUDER: They actually say that our plan that we have laid out right now is perfect for the weather. So, who can predict the weather? Nobody. And so you don't know if you have the perfect plan but we feel like we do.

We are supposed to land at their airport at seven o'clock, and it's supposed to open up at six. So if everything goes according to plan, we have a pretty good one in place.

Q. It's always tough to play back-to-back road games. How do you go about talking to your team and dealing with that?

COACH BLUDER: Quite honestly haven't given it much thought, because in my mind this is a whole new week. We had a day off yesterday. And so to me, this is kind of a new beginning to the week, and we put last one to rest. So I had not really thought about that, last Sunday and then going into this Thursday.

It probably would have been hard if we would have lost Sunday going on the road again, but we won Sunday, so I feel like this is just another Big Ten scenario really for us. I don't think that adds anything to it that we are back-to-back road games.

Q. Is there anything in particular that makes it so tough over there? Obviously they are better there -- is it dark? Is there anything surrounding-wise that makes itself --

COACH BLUDER: Well, a couple things. They draw very well. They are averaging about 7,700 people at a game, and so have great attendance and great home-court environment. Their band is very active. They are right there by our bench. So that makes it interesting.

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But also, I don't like the setup in that arena. It's probably the worst one I think in the Big Ten to coach in, because your bench is very far away from the sideline of the playing surface. There's a big gap between your bench and the sideline. So you feel like if you're out in the sideline with your team, or with your team, you're totally disconnected from your bench and your coaches. If you're with your coaches, you're totally disconnected from your team.

Also, it's got a slight raised floor on that side, so the players are sitting there basically with their knees at the level of the court. There's no legroom. It's very unusual and very uncomfortable, and I don't care for the arena because of that.

Q. I've also heard that they have really hard rims over there. Have you ever heard any players complain about that?

COACH BLUDER: I've never heard that and I never heard anybody complain about it. I'll go check it out, though, on Thursday.

Q. Did you see the Big Ten shaking out like this, teams like Wisconsin and Michigan in the mix, even though their overall records are not that great but they are doing really well in the Big Ten?

COACH BLUDER: Well, Wisconsin had a lot of injuries in the non-conference season and now they have all of those people back healthy so I don't think you can look at their non-conference schedule because they were dealing with those injuries.

I thought Wisconsin was going to be one of the top teams in the league this year. I thought they had everybody coming back; that was a key component. They were tied with us for third last year. So I thought they were going to be in that upper part of this group of teams vying for the Big Ten.

Who the other one -- Michigan? Michigan has done a really good job. I think that they have probably been the most surprise team at the top of the Big Ten, and Kevin has them playing well. They play good defense and they are doing a really nice job. To me, that's the one that's the big surprise.

You can say Penn State, as well. Coquese has done a great job of recruiting and she has them scoring and they have firepower and they press. They play a different style than

anybody else in the Big Ten, and that's good I think for the Big Ten because it gives a variety of different ways that we are playing against opponents, and also makes them unique your preparation for them. But they are a very good team and I think those two would probably be the surprise teams in the Big Ten.

Q. How are their styles different?

COACH BLUDER: Because they are one of the few teams that has a variety of full-court presses that they use and really there's nobody else in the Big Ten that really counts on their presses.

And then offensively, they are kind of like us. They are balanced and they have people that can score in a variety of ways, and anybody can come and have a great night. It's not like you have one -- you used to have always one person with Penn State you had to shut down. You shut down her, you were going to win this game. And now, it's not like that at all.

Coquese has done a tremendous job, and they are just explosive offensively. But defensively they are much different in the way that they switch up their defenses, they have a number of different styles of defenses that they play.

Q. Looking to do anything specifically this week to separate yourself from the pack?

COACH BLUDER: Win two games. That's what it takes. Got to win two games, and that still won't separate us from the pack. It will put us right into contention. It's a situation where you just have to win each game.

Q. How would you rate your January --

COACH BLUDER: I'm trying to think back to January. So that would be the start of the Big Ten Conference play, right? You know, you look back at the loss against Penn State and everybody thought, oh, that's a bad loss and looking back at it, it's not a bad loss.

Michigan at home still kind of haunts me even though Michigan is playing really well, I don't like to lose on our home court. I want this to be our castle and I don't want anybody else to come into our turf and invade our turf and Michigan was able to do that. That one is the one that bothers me more than anything else.

I don't think we have anything to be embarrassed about with the loss at Michigan State, or even the loss at Ohio State, even though I don't like the manner that we played in the second half.

I think this is such an incredibly tough conference. It's the No. 1 conference in America. And there's going to be people that have a lot of losses when you're playing against the people teams around, and just playing on a consistent basis, good team effort, good team effort, good team; there's nobody that can really put off stringing together that many wins in a row except maybe UConn.

Q. Why is there such a discrepancy between the RPI and like the AP or Coaches' Poll -- and when seeds come out in a month in a half.

COACH BLUDER: I think we might see some higher seeds than what we see in the AP and the Coaches' Poll, and that comes from a little bit of a lack of respect I think.

You know, I still think that people are not aware that the Big Ten is the best conference in America right now. And when people are not aware of it, maybe we are not doing a good enough job of marketing ourselves. We need to get the word out that this is the best conference in America, and that will influence maybe some of those voters that don't get to see us all the time.

Q. Last year you guys were fighting for your life at this time of the year and just trying to string together some wins. Now that your record is a little bit better, do you pay attention to the RPI and Charlie Creme's projections and stuff like that?

COACH BLUDER: I don't pay attention to Charlie Creme's projections. To me, that is so hard trying to predict who you're going to be make against and where you're going to be playing. And who cares, really?

But I do pay attention to the RPI, because the RPI is a good indicator I think of not only your record, but who that you've played against. And so to me, it's a good indicator of where you sit nationally, and I think it is something that the NCAA Selection Committee does look at. I know it is not the only thing they look at but it is something they look at in order to award those NCAA Tournament bids and the seeds. So that's something I do pay attention to.

Q. Do you think the conference is strong from one to 11, but maybe the top five are not as strong as other conferences?

COACH BLUDER: I think Michigan State is darn good. I'd say that maybe we don't have that one incredible powerhouse in our Conference like a UConn or a Stanford or a Baylor, like in some of those conferences do. But I do think the strength of our conference as a whole is what has made us the best conference in America right now because we are better one through 11 than other conferences are. Almost every conference has a couple of gimmes in there, and we just don't anymore.

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