

February 8, 2011



An Interview With:

COACH LISA BLUDER

COACH BLUDER: Well, obviously we're hoping to get back on the winning track this week. I think we have a chance to do that against Minnesota, although they're much improved. When we played them the first time they were in the middle of a seven-game losing streak and now they're coming in here on a three-game winning streak. So they're kind of coming in with all the momentum, and obviously we don't have much right now. So I hope that those can be changed with this game coming up.

The Minnesota-Iowa game is always just an incredible rivalry. It's very emotional for both teams. Minnesota, the border rivalry, a lot of our players are from the state of Minnesota, and so it's really emotional for them and meaningful for them to have a victory. A sweep over Minnesota is something we did not do last year, so this is something we can do that we didn't do last year.

A player that is now starting for Minnesota that wasn't the first time we played them is an Iowan, Kionna Kellogg from Ames, a teammate of Trisha Nesbitt, so that's an interesting angle that she is now in the starting lineup and she is playing pretty well for them.

Again, this week is important with the two games, at Northwestern. Obviously Northwestern coming off a good win off Ohio State. Northwestern is one of those teams that plays much stronger at home, and you only have the single game, and it happens to be at their place. So another important week. They all are at this time of year. We certainly hope to get back on the winning track against Minnesota.

Q. Obviously your losses are all against top 50 RPI teams, but do you feel that things aren't where you want them right now?

COACH BLUDER: I don't think coaches are ever happy with where they are to be quite

honest. We would love to have more W's than we do right now. But I do think we can still do some good things. I'm not ready to say that this season is not where we thought it was going to be. Are we going to reach our goal to be the Big Ten champion team, no, but we still have the tournament to look forward to.

I still think these last five games are important for the seeding purposes in the Big Ten tournament and also for the NCAA Tournament. I mean, we're still ranked 17th in the RPI, which is still incredibly strong. If we have some wins here at the end of the year, that could even go up, and that puts us in a real good position for the NCAA Tournament, as well.

Q. I know it's a couple weeks down the road, but talk about the NCAA seeding. You guys have been eight, nine, ten. It's important to get one of those higher seeds.

COACH BLUDER: Oh, it's incredibly important to get a higher seed. If you want to advance in the tournament, the best way is to go through the least resistance and that's having the lower number seeds. We've had some really tough seeds, yeah, and played against some great competition in the NCAA Tournament, but we're glad to be there. But yes, we'd love to get a better seed.

Q. With that said, how important is it to get out of that eight, nine range, especially as good as the top four or five teams in the nation are?

COACH BLUDER: Oh, I agree. We don't want to do what we did last year and play at Stanford, the No. 2 team in the country last year, so -- but again, all we can do is try to win every game and then the rest will take care of it, because really, we're sitting pretty good with our RPI right now. So I do believe if we do well in these last games, we could have a very good seed going into the NCAA Tournament.

Q. How has your team handled the

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burden of expectation this year?

COACH BLUDER: I'm not sure. And maybe that's been more stressful than I anticipated it being for them. I'm not really sure. But it is definitely something different than we had last year. Last year was no expectations, and so it was pretty free and easy. This year we came in with high expectations, and maybe the pressure has gotten to them a little bit more than I thought it would.

But I really -- I don't know, I just feel like we can still really achieve some good things this year in these last five games.

Q. Do you feel like having been in the top 25 all season, you're getting teams' best shot all the time, especially when they come in here?

COACH BLUDER: I think you do. It's like a badge; when you're in the top 25 or if you're sitting at the top of the Big Ten, those are reasons, more motivation, for people to take you down. We're the same way; when we have a team that's a top 25 team, we know the selection committee looks at that, how many wins do you have against a top 25 opponent. So when you're in that group, you know, that's a special game for whoever you're playing against, and I think you do get people's best shot in that situation.

But again, good teams got to be able to step up and handle it, too.

Q. In your own evaluation, where is this team coming up short on the court?

COACH BLUDER: I don't feel like we're really consistent, and that bothers me a little bit. Like if it was one area that I could put my finger on and say, okay, this is the area that we need to improve on for us to be successful, it would be so much easier for us. But right now it's like one game we do poor in the turnovers, the next game we do really well in the turnovers; this game we do great in free throws, the next game we do don't well in free throws; this game we do a good job rebounding, the next game we don't do a good job rebounding. So the consistency or lack of consistency I guess concerns me the most. One game we shoot well from three, the next game we don't. It's like you really don't know where you're going to sit going into every game and then you have to make adjustments during the game which are kind of tough.

Q. You mentioned a lot of reasons how you would not overlook Minnesota. How much of a factor is it that they're coming in with the three straight wins including the one on the road?

COACH BLUDER: Oh, I think it's significant for Minnesota. They were spiraling big time in that seven-game losing streak, and for them to turn it around -- and they turned it around against two good teams, they beat Michigan and Northwestern on their home floor, then they go on the road and beat Indiana, a team that beat them earlier in the season at Minnesota. So you can see how far Minnesota has come since the beginning of the year. They're playing much better.

It's kind of like us last year; we got that winning streak at the end of the year, and that momentum is really, really important and a confidence builder. So I think they're coming in with a huge amount of confidence into this game.

Q. Is this game a must-win for you guys?

COACH BLUDER: Every game is a must-win. And I hate to say this particular game is a must-win, but you want to win every single game. You know, I don't like those clichés, I guess.

Q. Kachine has got the green light. How is her foot or ankle?

COACH BLUDER: She is a little bit sore but nothing is damaged, and so she will be very spotty in practice today, probably just do shooting today, but hopefully she'll be back 100 percent tomorrow, but we just got that actually about a half an hour ago that everything is good to go.

Q. What was injured?

COACH BLUDER: I didn't really notice it in the game. It happened on a reverse lay-up on the first half, and as you can see she played pretty well the rest of the game on it. But after the game the doctor evaluated it, and he felt it was just a tendon that got twisted in there. So nothing significant, but we did have it X-rayed yesterday just to rule out any broken bones or any damage.

Q. Was it a foot or ankle?

COACH BLUDER: I'm sorry, it was a foot. My fault. It was her foot.

Q. Do you have any updates on Hannah and will she play on Thursday?

COACH BLUDER: I hope so. We're waiting right now for Hannah to get some beautiful eye goggles made, which I'm sure she will love wearing. You know, and it's tough to get used to those. She can't wear contacts for a month, and so she will have to practice and play in goggles. She doesn't have them yet. We're hoping she'll have them by tomorrow's practice, but that's not guaranteed yet. We know she'll have them by Thursday for sure, but we would love to get her into some practice wearing them before she tries to play with them in a game because it is a very big adjustment.

Q. Did she get something scratched?

COACH BLUDER: It was an infection, and she was in the emergency room on Saturday night at midnight with this. I don't know if you saw her at the game, but it was a pretty nasty-looking eye. She really, really was struggling with it.

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