

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Lisa Bluder

Women's Basketball Media Day

LISA BLUDER: Welcome, Hannah, our new women's basketball SID to the program, and look forward to working with her all year.

Obviously we're coming off a pretty historic year, and the excitement of our team is still there. You might think that's kind of crazy, considering what we lost, but when you have that type of success, you just want more, and you know what it takes to get it now.

This team has a mission to make people -- prove people wrong. They have an opportunity -- again, they've kind of got a chip on their shoulder a little bit. We know what we lost. We lost three key ingredients, three terrific starters that had tremendous experience for our basketball team, but this team is not ready to throw up the white flag.

The cast of characters may have changed. But the culture is the same, the joy of playing, the work ethic, all those things remain, and it all really begins with Kathleen Doyle. Kathleen, a four-year starter for us, captain of our team, has had such a great career and coming into her senior year. She had a pretty spectacular summer, as well, playing for the Pan-Am team, earning a silver medal for USA Basketball, and then also being named a preseason all-Big Ten selection unanimously. I believe there's only one other woman that was named unanimous all Big Ten, so that's quite an honor for her.

But you all know she leads this team with her enthusiasm, with her love of the game, just her -- she's a competitor. She's one of those kids that you kind of are glad you have on your team and you don't want to play against her. She's just a real emotional leader for us, and I think we really need that.

Makenzie Meyer, again, another four-year starter for us, somebody that has had so much experience, one of our best three-point shooters, and we're really going to be counting on that. Obviously our style is going to change a little bit this year and our point of emphasis is going to change, and so Makenzie's three-ball is going to be as important as it ever has been for us.



Amanda Ollinger, coming into her senior year, hasn't maybe played as much her first three years as she would have liked, but she's ready in her senior year, and I'm seeing her play her best basketball. In Spain she had two terrific games over there. Her offensive rebounding was so important to us, her size, her mobility, and so I'm really excited about what Amanda is going to bring to our team this year.

Lexi Sevillian, a redshirt junior, she's been around this program also now for four years and has had a tremendous experiences, an on-again off-again starter for us, another really good three-point shooter, and that's, again, something that we're really going to be counting on. Lexi has that experience to really provide that for us.

And it kind of brings me to Monika Czinano. Monika is going to be our starting center this year. Please do her the favor of not comparing her to Megan Gustafson. She's not Megan, she's her own person. She's better in some things than Megan was. But I think that's going to be something that really is holding her down all year if people keep trying to make that comparison because they're two different people.

Monika has an amazing work ethic. She has an incredible attitude. She soaks up information like a sponge, and she loved playing behind Megan all year and learning from Megan, and I'm excited about Monika because she embraces contact, she doesn't back away from it. There's so many post players -- I know we haven't seen them here because Megan did enjoy that contact, but there's so many post players around America that don't enjoy that, and she does. She gets down there and she'll rebound and she'll seal hard, and I think that we're all going to fall in love with Monika through her amazing attitude and work ethic through time.

We have several freshmen that I think are really going to contribute, but I just want to touch on all four of them. We do have four this year because Kate Martin was a redshirt last year, medical redshirt after tearing her ACL the prior June, so she is a freshman on our team and somebody that I really look to this year as being a major contributor, even as a freshman. She's that big guard. She's 6-foot, 6'1", can shoot threes, she rebounds well. She can take it to the hole really well

and finish around there. I think Kate Martin, even as a freshman, is going to contribute quite a bit for us. She did take her high school team to two Final Fours, her junior and senior year in Illinois, so she's a winner, and she has a coach for a dad, and so she knows how to be coached.

Also Gabbie Marshall, freshman point guard from Cincinnati, Ohio, won a couple state championships at Mount Notre Dame high school, played for one of the best AAU programs around, Ohio Sports City U, and shot over 50 percent from three-point range her senior year in high school when she was MVP of that team. Will play point guard for us, will also play off guard for us, and that's another freshman that you can see a lot of right off the bat.

And then we have McKenna Warnock, who was Miss Wisconsin Basketball. McKenna, again, is that kind of big guard like Kate Martin, that 6'1" guard that's strong that has the capability to go inside or out, and I like that versatility from her, as well.

And then Megan Meyer, the sister of Makenzie, so it's going to be interesting having a sister duo on the team. Again, it's kind of unusual, and Megan is a lot like Makenzie as far as her three-point shot capabilities, and I just maybe have to keep them away from each other sometimes, but it'll be fun to have both of them there. The Meyer family is just a tremendous family.

Our schedule, once again, is going to bring a lot of excitement to Carver-Hawkeye Arena. I just have to take a second and talk about our attendance last year. Leading the Big Ten in attendance, ninth in the United States; those are some really remarkable numbers when you think of the size of our community. And it just shows you how this state got behind the team, and I'm hoping that we can keep that excitement going and keep bringing those people back to Carver because I think they did fall in love with the women on our team, and I think that it'll happen again this year. The attendance was spectacular. Our fans are the best in the country, and we appreciate that.

We have some great games in Carver-Hawkeye Arena, including Drake University with the state series will be coming in. Drake is expected to have one of its best teams for a long time, so we're excited to bring Drake in and glad that we didn't have to go over and play them in Des Moines. And then we'll also be bringing in Princeton, a team predicted to win the Ivy League, a team that's always in the NCAA Tournament. It has one of the best centers in America on the team. They're going to be tremendous. And then we bring in Clemson for the Big Ten-ACC Challenge. Clemson also in the NCAA Tournament last year, and an ironic twist to that is that this summer we placed Tania Davis there as a

graduate assistant, not knowing that we were going to be playing Clemson in the Big Ten-ACC Challenge. Maybe you don't want your starting point guard from the last four years on an opposing team, but that's the way it is, and it'll be fun to welcome Tania back to Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

The Big Ten is as good as ever with five teams right now in some early polls being ranked in the top 25, so again, some great match-ups here in Carver-Hawkeye Arena. I'll be glad to take questions if you have them.

Q. You mentioned a couple days ago that Amanda would be someone that would really surprise this season. What specific things have you seen out of her in the off-season or in Spain to make you have that confidence?

LISA BLUDER: What I am happy to see about Amanda is just a different confidence level, and now she maybe just sees more of an opportunity and she's taking advantage of that. I see somebody that's going to the rim really hard for rebounds. Obviously with what we lost, a double-digit rebounder, we need to have rebounders on this team, and Amanda is doing a great job of going to the boards for us, so I really like that.

Q. I know she was a leader last year, obviously, but how organic of a move has it been, the kind of top responsibility to fall on Kathleen, given her energy and general demeanor? It seems like she's a fit to embrace all that comes with kind of being the focal point on this team.

LISA BLUDER: Kathleen has always been a leader, even from the minute she stepped on this campus. She may not have always had the captain title, but there are kids that are just natural leaders, and she's one of them. She loves that role. She embraces it. She's always been our emotional leader on the basketball team. So I think that she is ready for that challenge and excited about leaving her legacy here as a senior.

Q. Have you coached sisters before? How many sisters in the past? What has that dynamic been like?

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, I have coached sisters, but I think I have to go back quite a ways. I had twin sisters, the Meade sisters at St. Ambrose, and I'd say it's gone back quite a ways, so I don't think since then.

Q. What kind of dynamic did you find it to be? Was it challenging in any way, or was one sister trying to live up to the other; Makenzie has done some great things and here's Megan trying to catch up?

LISA BLUDER: I think twins -- the girls I had before were twins, so I think that's a different dynamic right there. This is kind of big sister-little sister. I'm sure they've had some unbelievable battles of horse in their

backyard before, and you think of Tom and Terry Brands and how they go after each other. I mean, these two have been competitive, and I think it's a good competition, though. I think it brings out the best in both of them.

It's kind of fun to see Makenzie hold Megan accountable, kind of that big sister, but also senior to freshman, like this is the way we do things. It's a little fun once in a while to see her roll her eyes and be exasperated with her, but it's kind of a unique situation, and it's going to be fun, I think.

Q. Coach Jensen said with about a minute left in that Missouri game, she said for you to step back and enjoy the moment. Do you get to do that very much during the season?

LISA BLUDER: Not too often. I think the last 30 seconds of the Maryland game when we knew we were going to win the Big Ten championship was kind of one of those moments. Otherwise you're kind of -- you're not in that many huge games throughout the year that you really can sit back and enjoy what happened. Usually when you're playing a game during the regular season it's like, okay, you win this one, you move on to the next one, and move on to the next one, so you don't take that time usually to enjoy it. But there was a couple of times last year where we were able to.

Q. The second-half crowd might have been one of the loudest men or women, wrestling, I've ever been to. That just had to energize you guys.

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, it was amazing, and I hope we get that kind of crowd again this year. I hope that people enjoyed what they saw last year and want to come out and support this group of women, and sure, there's going to be some growing pains. That's to be expected, I think. But if people liked the way that we played on the floor, they're still going to see that same kind of play.

Q. You talk about the players having a chip. Is it kind of the same with the coaches because now you have a chance to show what you guys can do after losing so many good players? Do you kind of see this as motivation, too, for you?

LISA BLUDER: I think that every year coming in you always want to do better than what you're expected to do, right? I think that's the competitive angle in all of us. So I think there's a little bit of that in us, as well.

I think it's fun for coaches to kind of in the off-season figure out what's going to work best for the team you have coming back, and how kind of -- what adjustments you can make, what kind of tweaks can you do to figure out how that best suits this team, and to me that's the fun part of coaching.

Q. You've had some outstanding teams that had success from the perimeter. Do you feel like you'll be more of a perimeter team as you go forward now this year?

LISA BLUDER: I do. I do think that we are going to be back to more of a perimeter team, and a couple of years ago we changed our style based on what we had coming back, and the strength of some of those players, so now we feel like this is an opportunity to go back to more of a guard-based offense.

For them, it's really fun. You have an opportunity to drive and dish and hit open threes, and it just gives you more room to operate than the offense that we ran the last couple years as far as guards. I think that the guards are going to enjoy that.

Q. What are reasonable expectations for this team in your mind?

LISA BLUDER: Reasonable? I want to be back in the NCAA Tournament. I definitely want to have that opportunity to be competing for a national title at the end of the year by playing in postseason play in the NCAA.

Q. Do you see similarities between 2016 when you guys made that Sweet 16 run and then you lost Sam and that group? Do you see similarities between this team and what you guys kind of reloaded after that year?

LISA BLUDER: Similarities in what we lost but not similarities in other things. I think the women that we have on this team are really ready to go and attack this situation, and just have a little bit different mindset.

Q. Even though she hasn't played a game yet, it seems like Kate Martin's demeanor and kind of her presence is gravitating toward one of those leader-type personalities. Is that the case, and how much is she ready to go obviously after having to watch last year's run and kind of observe that from the sidelines?

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, Kate is another natural leader, and you picked up on that. She really is. She's a person coming in here that's going to use her voice. She's incredibly coachable, hard worker, and she definitely has leadership qualities, so I'm excited about that because you don't want to have to every year teach or coach new leaders. You want to progressively bring them along. I think that's what we have to do so that every year you're not starting from scratch in that leadership role.

It's really important, I think, to identify young leaders and to try to help them come along in that, and Kate is definitely one of those people. So yeah, I think that

she's going to do -- I think she'll be a leader even though she doesn't have that title on the floor this year. She was a part of last year. She saw what it takes. She knows what kind of work ethic we have on our basketball team and what kind of attitude we have on our team. So I think even though she's a freshman, it puts her a little bit farther ahead than the other freshmen.

Q. If you had a game tonight, what would your starting lineup look like?

LISA BLUDER: Well, I can tell you that Kathleen would be on the floor, Makenzie would be on the floor, Monika would be on the floor. Amanda has been battling a few back issues right now, so I'm not sure that tonight she would play, but in two weeks she will. So with that, I probably would be looking at Lexi Sevillian and maybe Kate if you just take Amanda out of the picture.

Q. Two of the things that are impressive about Megan last year is how quick she got her shot up and the angle she used. Monika might not ever have that quickness, but can she learn the angles of the bang board?

LISA BLUDER: Certainly. There's no doubt that Monika can learn, and she tried to soak as much as she could in last year, but she certainly is doing the same kind of moves that Megan -- that we always teach, so yeah, I do believe that can happen. Is she going to be as quick getting the ball off? Who knows, we'll see. She's only a sophomore. She's only played one year of college basketball.

Q. With all the national awards for yourself, Megan, and what your team accomplished last year, how has it been different out recruiting now, and what kind of a push has that given you do you think?

LISA BLUDER: Well, after we won the Big Ten Tournament, we did a home visit in Minnesota and got a commitment, so I think that kind of shows you the impact that that had. We're seeing a lot of great interest from younger women, but you know, we had really already gotten -- we had three commitments that we're going to sign in November, already by early last year. So I don't know that there was a huge push last year because we had already gotten our commitments.

Q. Has a date been set for the formal deal with Megan and the uniform?

LISA BLUDER: No, we're still trying to work on when she will be back in order to have that happen.

Q. Were you able to use Spain to get an early look at how the offensive changes are, I guess, pulling back from the memory bank before this run of post players? With everybody kind of recalibrating to that style, how was that trip and how have the early

practices been and kind of getting everybody back to more of a guard-oriented approach to things?

LISA BLUDER: Spain was terrific. It could not have come at a better time for us. We had 10 practice days, and when you're teaching a new offense, you basically have 13 freshmen on the floor, and you don't have that typically. You usually have your upperclassmen able to bring along your freshmen, and we didn't have that luxury this year, so those 10 practice days came at an ideal time for us. And it also pointed some things out to us coaches that we needed to really work on in these 30 days leading up to the first game, things that maybe we hadn't taught as well or maybe some things that we hadn't put enough emphasis on once competition came into play over there. I think those are good things for us coaches, as well, to see.

Q. When you're switching it up like that, how important is it to have -- like you talked about the two veteran guards being able to manage some of the growing pains?

LISA BLUDER: What you look at really is even though they have played this offense as a freshman, that was a long time ago. Three years in a long time in a college person's life, so that was a long time ago for them. What I'm really expecting from our seniors is more of the leadership of culture, of work ethic, of the joy of the game, and playing for each other and being great teammates. You know, when you do those things, I don't care what offense you run, you usually have some pretty good success.

Q. What will the roles be for some of the middle class kids, Jr., sophomore, like Tomi or Zion or Logan? How do they fit into the mix?

LISA BLUDER: I think right now I kind of gave you a top six. We're kind of working on who's going to be in that next group. With this offense, you do -- in my opinion have to substitute a little bit more because it is a little bit more physically demanding, so it lets you hopefully go to your bench a little bit more, but I think those are things that we're still trying to work out in the last two weeks here leading up to our first game.

Q. You talked about Amanda and expecting some big things from her. We know she can shoot, but are you wanting her to be more kind of a post player or still being able to use that -- be able to use her ability to still shoot the three?

LISA BLUDER: Both. I'm not really answering your question, but we really like her versatility, ability to post, ability to shoot from outside, ability to catch in traffic. Those are things that are going to be really important for us this year.

But there are some times that Amanda will be called upon to play some post defense. There's some good

zone things that we can do to help her lack of girth in there that would maybe have you worried, but we're not worried because of some of the different zone things that we can do.

Q. Health-wise are you guys pretty good across the board aside from Amanda's --

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, we are. Like I say, Amanda has had a little bit of issue -- and she's had this on again, off again throughout her career, a little bit of a back issue. So she missed some practices early, but she's coming back right now and doing a -- I'm really excited about Amanda, and I just really hope that she has a great senior year because she deserves it.

She's waited patiently these last three years and played incredible role minutes for us that were really, really valuable. You just want your seniors to have special years, and I certainly want that for Amanda.