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An Interview With:

COACH LISA BLUDER

COACH BLUDER: Big week for us. Here we are, the last week of the season. It's amazing that it's here already, and we're talking about our final two games and our senior night. Senior night is always tough. You have to say goodbye to people that have been really a huge part of your program for the last four years, and this one, I think, is really special because of what Kelsey and Kachine have done for our program.

To think about what they've done over the last four years, four 20-win seasons in a row, on the verge of four NCAA Tournament appearances in a row, you know, that's tradition. They're leaving a legacy behind. And I think that we need to have a great sendoff for them against Illinois.

Kelsey has never really gotten the limelight that Kachine has gotten, but Kelsey has been very instrumental in our success. She is the captain on our team and she was voted captain by her peers. She is always the one that's helping everybody, organizing things, keeping people accountable, motivating others, really just kind of having a servant's type of attitude towards everybody and making this program better. And I think that's harder to do when you're not getting the glory of being on the court. So I have a tremendous amount of respect for what Kelsey has done the last four years.

Kachine, nobody can argue with her on-court success and what she has accomplished. I think right now she's the third leading rebounder in the Big Ten. She continues to help us so much defensively, rebounding, her penetration to the basket. She's just had a tremendous career here at Iowa.

And I think the best way we could send them off is to have a huge crowd, break that attendance record and beat Illinois. I think our marketing department has done some great things to get people excited about this game. Like

always, kids are free on Thursday night, but they're having all sorts of promotional giveaways and ways to get reduced priced tickets by going on Facebook, Twitter, or Hawk Talk subscribers are getting \$5 tickets, as well. So hopefully we'll make history and hopefully we'll get a win over Illinois.

Illinois comes in losing 10 in a row, and to me these are one of those dangerous programs because they want nothing less than to be a spoiler for us. They've lost ten in a row, but two points to Penn State, one of the best teams in our Big Ten; in overtime to Northwestern. They're there. They're right in games; they're just not able to win it.

And this is a team that features one of the best players in the Big Ten in Karisma Penn, only a sophomore averaging a double-double, averaging nearly 20 points a game and 11 rebounds. She's a handful. She had 33 against Michigan State. That's some incredible statistics. She's a very, very athletic good post player that has range, can penetrate, is very mobile inside, has great jumping ability, great hands, and we're going to have to really focus on her.

Amber Moore, also a very good three-point shooter with very good range, and so we're going to have to keep our eyes on her, as well.

Even though their record isn't that strong, this is a team that could really raise havoc the last week of the season and going into the Big Ten Tournament. I'm glad we have them on our home court.

Q. When Kachine was a freshman and ineligible did you sit down and talk to her and say you've got a great future, hit the books and get ready to go?

COACH BLUDER: Kachine handled that situation so well. Here she is her freshman season and halfway through she becomes academically ineligible. A lot of kids at that point quit, go home, transfer, and those thoughts were never expressed to me. She decided that she wanted to make the most of this opportunity, and she definitely has. She's kept her grades up since that point, and

obviously she's worked on deficiencies in her game that made her more of an all-around player.

Q. If you guys are able to set the attendance record, what will that mean to you and this program?

COACH BLUDER: You know, it's fun. It's fun. It says that people are excited about our program. People want to support the women that are on the floor and on the team for this program. It helps us with recruiting to be able to say those type of things. So I just think it, again, is kind of another maybe benchmark of where this program is heading and how far we've come. So it would be a good accomplishment.

And it's not going to be easy. I mean, 7,400 people in here on a weeknight is not going to be easy, but again, I think there's all the right reasons to come out for this game.

Q. Do you remember the first time you saw Kachine play?

COACH BLUDER: No, I don't know. I probably have it written down in our computer back in the office, but I don't remember the exact first time that we saw her play. I do know it was in AAU. I know it was in the summer. I can't remember if it was going into her sophomore year. It must have been going into her sophomore year, but there's not like some lightbulb that went off that that's the first time I saw her, no.

Q. Could you have imagined this for her?

COACH BLUDER: Well, the reason that she was recruited is because she was a defensive stopper and she just played with a tenacity and loved rebounding. And you can still see those things today.

But people shied away from her because she struggled scoring, and so -- that is something that she's worked on since she's gotten here, and she has gotten better over the years. You know, I think, again, she's worked hard at improving her weaknesses over the time she's been a Hawkeye.

Q. It seemed like the last two schools were Iowa and Marquette. Minnesota didn't think she could score. Obviously there's a lot of recruits in Minnesota.

COACH BLUDER: Right, there is a lot of competition in Minnesota because there's so many good players in that state. But you know, you look at Alyssa Karel, she's from Minnesota, a starter for

Wisconsin, had a great career. She's in that same class. So there are a lot of players in Minnesota.

You know, recruiting is not a science. It's not black and white. It's really -- you don't know. Sometimes you make a gamble on a kid and they turn out really well. Sometimes you get the all-star blue chipper and they don't turn out so well. You can't look into a crystal ball. Hindsight is always 20/20, but when you're looking ahead it's a tough call sometimes.

Q. How good would it be to go into the Big Ten Tournament on a five-game winning streak?

COACH BLUDER: It would be great momentum for us. You want to be playing your best at the end of the year, and just so much of this game is confidence and momentum, and if we had a five-game winning streak going into the Big Ten Tournament I think that would be great for us. It would probably mean that we'd get the first round bye, which would be great, because nobody has played in that first day and then won the championship. So that's kind of the first hurdle is just to get off that first day. And things are looking good right now for us to do that. But obviously we have to win two this week.

Q. Would a layoff help Trisha a little bit so she can stay off her foot a little more, or is that going to be wait until the end of the season?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, it's really more of a wait until the end of the season. We practiced hard Thursday, Friday, Saturday. We gave them Sunday and Monday off, but we really went pretty hard on those other three days.

Q. When do coaches make their picks for All-Big Ten?

COACH BLUDER: It's next Tuesday. Wait. I think we have to have them in by next Monday because it's announced on Tuesday, so yeah, it can be anytime -- I think they're sending them out today. Today until -- you can vote from Tuesday until Monday.

Q. Who would you vote for for Player of the Year and Coach of the Year right now?

COACH BLUDER: Coach of the year, I think a lot of it comes down to what happens with Penn State ending out here, but I would say

Coquese or Suzy are definitely two tremendous Coach of the Year candidates in the league. And Player of the Year to me is either Jantel or Kalisha Keane. I think what Kalisha has done for her team this year and taken them to No. 1 is pretty remarkable, but nobody wants to -- when I think of who I want to guard, Jantel Lavender is pretty tough.

Q. Talk about how you're going to deal with Karisma, stopping her, I guess, or slowing her down.

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, we have a plan, a game plan, and we'll go into the game trying to execute that game plan as much as we can. But I know that Illinois is going to read these papers so I'm not going to go into it explicitly.

Q. How much has Kelsey had to battle injuries over the course of her career?

COACH BLUDER: You can just look at Kelsey and tell she doesn't move real fluidly. She's had almost continual back problems since she's been here, and that's hampered her time in the weight room and it's hampered her conditioning and speed and development and those sort of things. But again, over the last few games she's really done some great things for us. I mean, Northwestern she had nine. Last game she had a beautiful take to the basket against Wisconsin. So those are some things that I'm going to remember about Kelsey's legacy here.

Q. Obviously she wasn't recruited as a post. How has she adapted to that role she's had to fill this year?

COACH BLUDER: Kelsey has adapted to anything we've given her. We've told her she's going to play the three, we've told her she's going to play to four, we've told her she's going to play the five. She never even blinked. She doesn't hesitate, doesn't back down to any challenge. Whatever we've needed from her, she's responded, and it's just like you'd like all your players to respond to those type of requests. She's been marvelous with it.

Q. Do you have a time limit on Kachine's speech on Thursday night?

COACH BLUDER: No, she can have it -- I think she deserves the microphone as long as she wants it on Thursday night.

Q. What has she brought personality-wise to this program?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, that's a whole 'nother element. She just has the gift of gab as you've noticed, but she also has the gift of enthusiasm. I mean, she just shines. When she makes a great play and she comes out fist pumping and that big ol' smile on her face or yelling, it gets everybody in the gym excited, and it certainly gets her teammates and coaches motivated, as well. So she just has that ability. She has a passion about the game. She doesn't back down to challenges. Again, she wants to have the best player to defend. She wants that role. But another element is her enthusiasm and her passion that really make her special.

Q. Would she make a good coach?

COACH BLUDER: Oh, I think she'll make a very good coach. She's got an incredible mind for the game, and she'll see things on the floor. She'll bring very good comments to the timeouts and to halftime. She wants to be a coach, and I think that she'll be an amazing role model, and I think that she'll do a very, very good job. You know, it's just getting that foot in the door and getting started with it. But I know she wants to coach at the college level.

Q. Some other players maybe can do those type of things, the fist pumps and maybe they're labeled as cocky, but it doesn't seem like Kachine ever has been.

COACH BLUDER: No, I don't think so. I mean, to me it doesn't reflect that. To me it just is an exuberance. It's I'm excited, I want to share it. But to me it isn't cocky at all, and I've never heard anybody really say that. Maybe that's how opponents feel, but I've never had other coaches say that to me or anybody, so I think people recognize it for what it is; it's just a sheer love for the game and an exuberance for that play.

Q. Obviously your points and rebounds next year are going to be rough to replace, but who's going to replace that exuberance?

COACH BLUDER: That's a great question, and I don't know. Right now I haven't stopped to think who's going to be that person. Trisha has a great personality, as well, and I think we've missed that a little bit this year. With her not being as instrumental and her being injured, we've

missed her personality on the court. So she definitely has the personality that can bring it.

So I'm not sure with our five incoming players who can be that type of person right there, but we will miss it, you're right.

Q. Talk about Kamille being a little bit more vocal this year. She was a little bit more quiet her first year and never really said much, then the second year a little more and now this year starting to get a little more leadership role?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, she's a captain on our team, and with that you have to be vocal, and she's learned to come out of her box a little bit and do things that are uncomfortable for her, and part of that is being a vocal leader. And so she's still learning, and she's still getting better. But she is much, much improved over a year ago.

Q. Going back to that attendance thing, I know it's something that maybe has dogged the program a little bit, that you couldn't get the numbers in here. Is it a relief to kind of set that record and be up there with some of those '90s teams?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, it just feels good. It feels right, and our fans have been great this year. I mean, they've just -- and they've been loud. They come to the arena, they don't sit on their hands. They appreciate the players and the effort that they give, and so they've just been tremendous. You know, I think this would be a fitting way for this senior class to go out with that type of a record in addition to what they've already done. But whether we break it or not, it's been a great year for our attendance, and I just want to thank our fans for what they've done for us.

Q. Do you think it's a function of the great turnaround last year, the tournament win and the ranking this year, or is there more to it?

COACH BLUDER: It's a combination of things. I think we've had success over a period of time, and I think that helps. People want to support a winner. But I also think that our players are enjoyable to watch. I think that they do, they execute well, they show good teamwork, they show great effort. They're incredible role models on and off the floor, so they're people you want to support.

And then I think our marketing department has done a much better job this year at really trying to get the word out about our games and doing

some more creative promotions, and so I think that's kind of all kind of intertwined.

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