



2015 Big Ten Basketball Media Day

Thursday, October 15, 2015

Iowa Coach Lisa Bluder

COACH BLUDER: All right. Well, it's obviously a new season for us and a very different look. After losing three seniors that played significantly -- I mean, left the Big Ten Conference as the leading scoring trio of all time -- we're a different look. And a lot of people are kind of counting us out because of that.

And I would have to disagree with that because we returned quite a bit, actually. We returned two starters, including Ally Disterhoft, who was a preseason All-Big Ten pick here. And I want to congratulate her for that.

Then we also return Whitney Jennings, who, as a freshman last year, was a starter for us and did an exceptional job. But now she's ready to move into a bigger role because of -- you know, last year she was behind those three seniors, and it was a lot of leadership to be behind. And now, as a sophomore with more experience, she's ready to lead this basketball team as our point guard.

We also return our best players off the bench. Kali Peschel, a senior, who was the second-best three-point shooter on our team last year. Nobody remembers that because of how good Melissa Dixon did from the three-point range.

We return Chase Coley at center, who was backing up Beth. She was our leading field goal percentage shooter on our team last year.

So we do have some good, good elements to work with. And definitely we have some good freshmen. We are the 17th-best recruiting class in America coming in as our freshman class. So we have to remember that those players that are returning this year are why those three seniors were so good. Those are the players that made these three seniors great.

Q. Question is about -- you guys went on a foreign trip this summer. That's always great for team chemistry, especially when you have so many losses. How did it help you on the court? And do you feel like you have a better direction with your team now than you would have, say, if you wouldn't have taken that trip?

COACH BLUDER: Our foreign tour came at absolutely the best time that we could have done this. With eight freshmen and sophomores on our basketball team, we just need experience. We have talent. We just need experience. We need repetition.

And yesterday we finished our ninth practice. It was actually our 19th practice. That's a big difference. That puts us ahead of the curve, in my opinion. So those 10 practice days were valuable.



2015 Big Ten Basketball Media Day

Thursday, October 15, 2015

To me the competition over there, that's not a big issue. They play a different style. When you go over there, to me, it's about building chemistry, building camaraderie. And that's been a strong point of our basketball team at Iowa, is the chemistry, the teamwork, the assists. That's something that we really stress. And it's something that we can really work on and develop on a foreign-tour situation, which we did.

Q. Coach, can you talk a little bit more about the freshmen that are coming in and where you expect them to make the most immediate impact?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah. We have four freshmen coming in. Again, this is the 17th-best recruiting class. And a big part of that, Tania Davis, point guard from Flint, Mich. She was ranked as the 12th-best point guard in the country. She's fast. She's effective as far as setting up her teammates. But she can also score. She's a great defensive player.

I think with Whitney and Tania, we are exceptionally fast in the guard court. And that's something that we intend to use. We're a different looking front court with those guys.

Megan Gustafson was ranked the 12th-best center in America. She is coming in after -- she is the leading scorer in Wisconsin history. She's a post player that we really needed. She's a post player that likes to play with her back to the basket. Those kids are few and far between anymore. So we're glad to have her.

And two other top 100 players were Tagyn Larson from South Dakota and Hannah Stewart from North Dakota, who all give us size because they're both over 6'1", 6'2" at the wing position.

Q. So with making it to the Sweet 16 last season, how are you going to match the same intensity as you had in the season before?

COACH BLUDER: You know, I don't think that losing players changes your intensity. It's something we try to build. It's something that's a part of our culture. It's something that we don't have to recreate. You know, eight of our women that are returning were there every single day in practice. They were in the locker room every single time. They know what it takes.

So I don't think it's, you know, because of losing certain players you're going to lose that intensity. I think you have a culture that you establish in your program that continues to roll.

And, yes, we have to teach the freshmen that culture, absolutely. But, you know, you get somebody like Ally Disterhoft leading you, you don't lose in intensity, and Whitney Jennings, you don't lose in intensity.

Q. Coach, with Whitney playing point as well and Tania coming in, how are you going to have those two in the mix?



2015 Big Ten Basketball Media Day

Thursday, October 15, 2015

COACH BLUDER: You know, our offense doesn't require that we have one point guard on the floor and one small forward and one off guard and one power forward. We play what we call positionless basketball.

I can have three point guards on the floor at the same time. I can have a point guard and three power forwards on the floor at the same time. We just have the best players. We don't run sets. We run an offense. And with that, it gives us the luxury of just having the best players on the floor regardless of position.

Q. A lot of times when there's roster turnover, lose a lot of seniors, chemistry can be an issue. What have you seen in the off-season, you know, to make you confident or not confident about that?

COACH BLUDER: Chemistry is a big part of our program. Chemistry is -- you know, I try to explain to our kids that sometimes I think we beat teams that may have more talent than us because of our teamwork, because of our assists, because of our teamwork, in valuing the good shot, in giving up an average shot for a great shot. And our team understands that. They buy into that.

So we value chemistry. We don't underestimate how important that is for a basketball team. It's something we work on all the time, not a one-time seminar, but all the time. And it certainly was escalated in bringing this team together, having ten days in Italy together and having ten practice days before that.

Q. Was wondering, that same philosophy, I heard a lot when you coached the Pan Am Games this summer, giving up a good shot for a great shot.

Having that type of talent surrounding you every single day, what were you able to bring back from that experience that you could then share with your team and just continue that philosophy but make it even bigger?

COACH BLUDER: I mean, it was a great experience to coach the Pan Am team and to coach some of the best players in the country. But one thing that you can't establish in a short time when you're an international coach for USA Basketball is that chemistry piece. I think that's really hard to develop because we had nine practices before we left to go to the Pan Am Games. It's not time really to build that chemistry and to build that valuable piece.

So to me, when I came home, I came to my basketball team and literally almost had tears in my eyes when I saw them because I could feel the love in the room, I could feel how much we wanted to go back together again. And that chemistry piece is there at Iowa, and it feels so good. So, again, it just emphasized to me again how important that element is to playing basketball.