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An Interview With

COACH LISA BLUDER

COACH BLUDER: Good morning. It's wonderful to have you all here this morning. We appreciate you taking time out of your day to come.

There's been a change this year to the Women's Basketball Tournament. And that is that there's no longer predetermined home sites. The last two years we've been able to secure home sites and that's been wonderful for us. But this year we're going to have to earn it in a different way.

And that is that you have to be one of the top 16 teams in the country in order to have your home court advantage. And that's the goal. That's the vision that we have for this team. Hopeful that something special is going to happen with this group of women.

I think they're an extraordinary group. And as you all know, we returned four starters from last year's team that won 27 games. And it's not just that we returned four starters that creates our optimism, but it's the quality of those starters that gets us really excited.

We're led by our four-year starting point guard, Sam Logic. No one in the league, and maybe in the country, has as much experience leading their basketball team than Sam. She's the nation's best returning assist play maker. She led our team and the Big Ten in assists. She already owns the Iowa assist record with a whole season remaining.

She's a preseason All Big Ten selection. There were only five of those named out of 14 teams, so that's quite an accomplishment already.

I know that I wouldn't want anyone else to be leading our team this season except for Sam. She's an unbelievable competitor. And she's passionate about the Iowa Hawkeyes and about our teammates.

Bethany Doolittle will once again occupy the middle for us. Beth led our team in scoring, and also field goal percentage, shooting at 55 percent, which was second best in the Big Ten. Beth led our team in blocked shots. She was 14th best in the nation in shots blocked.

Beth has such great mobility in the post. Her ability to run the floor for a big is really good. Her timing on blocks and just, again, her mobility is extraordinary. Her range is also very, very good for a center position.

Melissa Dixon, another senior with loads of experience, playing experience, returning for us, probably one of the best 3 point shooters that I've been able to coach. Last year she set the Iowa record for most threes made in a season.

And of course Ally Disterhoff, our local player; everybody should be excited about supporting her, coming from Iowa City West High School, had a spectacular freshman season. Ally was our team second best rebounder and third best four, last year, and she shot is a 49 percent on the way to be named to the All Freshman Big Ten team.

She now has a little more experience, a little more confidence that's going to give her a boost going into her sophomore season.

I'm also expecting big contributions from Ally and Alexa, as both of them have made major improvements from last season.

We're welcoming four freshmen to our team, Whitney Jennings, who was named Miss Indiana Basketball last year. Whitney is one of the quickest ball handlers that I've ever coached. For those old-timers in the room she kind of takes me back to Crystal Smith. And that's, I think, a very good comparison on how fast she is with the basketball.

But not only can she handle the ball, she's an excellent passer, especially in the full court for transition offensive. She's got a nice three point shot and a great pull up jumper, as well.

Chase Coley, the Gatorade Player of the Year in Minnesota last year, gives us more depth as the center position. She needs to continue to

gain strength, but she really reminds me of Bethany Doolittle as a freshman.

Christina Bутtenham was a member of the Canadian Junior National Team last summer. And thus she missed our summer workouts. But she's quickly working hard to grasp our system and catch up quickly. She will play the wing position for us this year.

And then Carly Mohns, a first team All-State honoree in Wisconsin, is a 6-2 strong power forward. She gives us that blue collar mentality. She's a great rebounder, and that's something we really needed.

We have a difficult challenge ahead of us again with this schedule. It's going to prepare us for the Big Ten, our non-conference. Out of 29 games, 20 of them are against teams that were in postseason play last year.

The non-conference schedule, a lot of people take it light, preparing for the Big Ten, but we've never done that. And this year once again our non-conference schedule includes Dayton, Gonzaga, Arkansas, Louisville, Colorado, Iowa State, Drake and UNI, who were picked to finish second and third in the Missouri Valley Conference.

You're well aware that our Big Ten has grown to include Maryland and Rutgers. Maryland is a team that was in the Final Four last year. And Rutgers, a team that won the postseason WNIT team... and returns everybody from that team. Neither one of them will be coming to Carver Hawkeye Arena this year, we'll be traveling to both of those places. So our conference has grown. It's gotten even more competitive than it was in the past.

But while we're excited to get our season going.

Q. Twenty-seven wins last year with only one player over 6-foot-1, that's quite an accomplishment.

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, it was a great year for us. It was great not only because of the wins, playing the Big Ten championship game, our run in the tournament was really fun. Hosting the NCAA Tournament, beating Marist convincingly in the first round, but it's the manner, really, that made it fun, not just those accolades of those wins, but the manner in which we won. The type of style we played with.

We're leading the Big Ten in scoring. Leading the Big Ten in assists. Leading the Big

Ten in field goal shooting, having five players average double figures. And that's pretty special. And it's hard to accomplish that. There were only three times in the NCAA tournament that had five people that averaged double figures. Iowa, Connecticut and Marist. That's how difficult it is to accomplish that. But that shows you the style of team play that we enjoy.

Q. You said before how close the team was, how much they enjoyed playing with each other. Kathryn Reynolds doesn't really have the statistical résumé some of the other players do, but yet she was voted team captain. What is it about her that I guess makes her so popular?

COACH BLUDER: You don't have to have the most points or the most minutes on the floor to be a good leader. She's a great leader for us. Our team has so much respect for her. Kathryn does everything right on the court and off the court.

She's been hampered by injuries since she's been here. But Kathryn graduated in three years. As a senior she's a first year law student here at Iowa. That's amazing. And I think our team respects her for the success she has academically, but also for what she contributes in the locker room. I know fans don't get to see that. You guys don't get to see what she adds to our locker room. But when she talks, everybody listens.

Q. Talk about special teams. And scoring, defense is critical, you'd like to button it up this year. Just your thoughts on where you'd like to be there this year?

COACH BLUDER: The areas that we need to improve on are defense and rebounding. Well, I don't always look at scoring defense, though, because we play an up-tempo game. We're going to give opportunities for our opponents to score more, because we're shooting the ball quicker.

I like to look at margin, I like to look at that. And I also like to look at field goal percentage defense. And that's an area we need, in my opinion, to really improve on. And we're trying to challenge our team with that every day to improve in that category.

Again, I think Carly Mohns is going to help us rebound. Kali Peschel has been really working hard on rebounding, that's another area. And to me, rebounding is opportunities to win. Because

every time you get a rebound you're taking away an opportunity from your opposing team, so that's very important for us to control the boards.

Q. Will Claire Till be able to handle some of the four position this year?

COACH BLUDER: I don't anticipate Claire moving out, just because of the limitations of her knees. She's really limited. She has been through more surgeries than a person should have to go through. And unfortunately her knees are not cooperating with her. She's played very minimally so far in our practice season. Just being able to guard a five is a lot easier for her than having to go out on the perimeter and having to close out on a driver.

Q. With the incoming freshmen adding depth; how will you handle a deeper rotation?

COACH BLUDER: I think we're going to have quite a few freshmen contribute for us. I don't know how you keep Whitney Jennings off the floor, and that's a great problem to have, isn't it? I know she was a point guard in high school. Sam is a point guard. But there have been numerous times that we've played two, three point guards that played in high school. Just because you played point guard in high school, doesn't mean you're restricted to that position once you go to college.

I think Whitney is definitely going to be on the floor quite a bit for us. I think Chase will be on the floor for us because of our need to develop her for future, for us to give depth to Bethany. She's not there yet. But we need her there in March, and it's a long season. But we need to get her in to get her better, and get her confident.

I think Carly Mohns, just by virtue of that rebounding that we talked about, it's fun watching her rebound. She's a bull. She just goes after it. And that's very fun.

Q. You said Chase has to get a little stronger? Can you do that during the season or is that more of an offseason thing?

COACH BLUDER: It's a concentration in the offseason, but certainly Chase has a ways to go, and so I think we'll see improvements during the season, as well. But, yeah, it certainly is the concentration that we have.

I think she's put on 20 or 25 pounds since she's been here already. When you see here it will be amazing. She's getting there. She's getting

stronger. Are we going to see a huge jump now? Probably not. But Chase has quickness. Chase has agility, just like Bethany did as a freshman. And sometimes you just have to learn to use your strength and not worry about your weaknesses. And that's what Chase has to do is understand that she's a very mobile post. That she's got good shot range. That she has to use her feet and her quickness and her smarts instead of her brawn.

Q. Is this the most optimistic, most high expectations there have been around this program since you've been here?

COACH BLUDER: I'd say it's the most preseason hype that we've had since we've been here. We've certainly had lots of expectations at the end of the season for us quite often, including our first year here. Nobody expected anything out of us at the beginning of the year. At the end of the year we're a top 16 team. And so I'd say for preseason it's the most hype that we've had.

Q. What has the year done for Ally, what are her biggest gains?

COACH BLUDER: Ally got stronger. As a freshman she didn't have much strength. But you look at her, and you don't see it, but it's there. Ally has a great ability to be able to get to the rim, accept the contact and still make a basket. You don't do that unless you're strong. You don't do that unless you're crafty around the hoops. She uses her body to accept the contact and is able to make the old-fashioned three-point play.

But her ability to shoot from three and her ability to get to the basket makes her hard to guard. I'm challenging her with really rebounding. Last year she did a good job for us on the boards and she can even improve more in that area. Last year defense was something that was kind of new for her. And she's gotten better with that area.

Q. Comment on recruits. You obviously got a lot of commitments for the next two classes. Is this where you kind of envision the program?

COACH BLUDER: It's a great place that we're in with recruiting right now. Next year we look for the '15 class, the seniors in high school right now, we're done with that class and we are looking forward in November to signing those women to letters of intent. And we have a huge start on the 16 class. It's a great situation to be in.

Now, we can really even start going after sophomores and working hard on those players this year. So we're ahead of the game in recruiting, there's no doubt.

Q. Is it a combination of winning, abilities and your staff staying together for all this time?

COACH BLUDER: I think it's all those things. I think the consistency of our program, the success that we've been in seven straight NCAA tournaments, and the nobody else in the Big Ten can say that. I think that's huge.

People want to play for a winner. They want to play for a team that has proven themselves over time. And we've proven that we're not a one-hit wonder; we can continue to succeed consistently over a period of time.

And why is that? And I think a lot of that is because of our staff, because we have been here. We're the longest reigning Big Ten staff. Janet and Jenni have been with me for 23 years, that's unheard of.

I think parts look at that and respect that. I think AU coaches understand the value of that and high school coaches and they know those people because they've been here. I think Lacey, although she's only been here one career, she's done great for us. She blended in with our staff as a veteran. I think our staff is a big part of that.

And I also think the Big Ten network is a part of that. Before they didn't see us play. They didn't know what Iowa was and they had an image of what Iowa was. Now we can erase any bad images, because they can see us play and they like the style of play. They enjoy watching our team play. I think we're a fun team to watch. We score. We run. We pass the ball with great efficiency. And who wouldn't be want to be a part of a team that's having fun on the floor and they see the team chemistry. I think the Big Ten network has been one of our better recruiting tools.

Q. Eight of the first 12 games are at home. You've got to like that. And what are your thoughts of starting Big Ten games before the new year?

COACH BLUDER: Big Ten play with the addition of two more schools and moving from 16 to 18 Big Ten games, moves our Big Ten schedule up a week. Do I love it? No. Are we going to change it? No. So deal with it. That's how I look at

it. Those are one of the things I don't have any control over. So I'm not going to worry about it.

But, yeah, we only play 11 non-conference games. We have a great home court schedule, hosting Colorado, hosting Iowa State. Those are two teams we had to play on the road last year, so that's exciting.

We're in a great tournament in Vegas, playing against Arkansas and Gonzaga. And then going to Louisville and playing a team that took us out of the NCAA tournament. It's a very, very challenging non-conference schedule, but I do like that, yes, we do have eight of them at home, that's great.

Q. You're playing St. Ambrose in an exhibition. That's got to bring back great memories of the '80s when they had St. Ambrose teams come here.

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, it is. It's special for me. You know, we typically don't play an NAIA school. We usually played a Division Two school that's ranked in the top 20 for our exhibition game.

This year is special because -- a couple of reasons, one is Sam Logic's younger sister, Brett, plays at St. Ambrose. And this is an opportunity for the two Logic sisters to go head-to-head on Carver Hawkeye Arena. That will be worth the price of a ticket, alone, because Brett is just about as strong-headed as Sam is.

And then obviously I started there in 1984, my coaching career. And it's an opportunity for me to bring St. Ambrose back in here, and a lot of great memories, as you said.

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