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An interview with:

COACH BLUDER

COACH BLUDER: All right. Well, Penn State comes to town. Obviously, a great opportunity for us, No. 1 team in the league, Top 10 in the country. And these kind of teams seem to bring out the best in the Hawks, so, hopefully, that will happen again tomorrow night.

Obviously, Penn State only has the one Big Ten loss on the year at Wisconsin, and we've got to look at that and hope to see that they are vulnerable, especially on the road, but they do have two of the best players in the league on their team.

Alex Bentley was one of the preseason picks and Maggie Lucas, obviously, one of the best shooters, not only in the Big Ten, but in the United States. I mean, she is one of the best scoring guards in the whole country. Great range, quick release, gets her feet set so quickly on her shot, she's just a tremendous three-point shooter and shooting nearly 50% from three-point range.

So this is obviously a good team. They're not just an offensive team. They're a very good defensive team. Holding their opponents to the low-50s as far as points in games. A big team, an athletic team, a quick team, very good in transition, so we're going to have our work cut out for us.

But I do like the energy our team brought to practice yesterday. I thought they bounced back well after Nebraska, and they're ready to go against Penn State tomorrow.

Q. You mentioned good energy. How do you feel their confidence is right now?

COACH BLUDER: I think any time that you've lost a number of games in a row, you have to check the confidence, and you've got to check and make sure that you're still there. Because the

minute you start losing that, you're in trouble. I think we all understand that. We all realize it, and we're all trying our best to try to keep confidence high, because that is the only way you're going to have an opportunity to win games.

Q. Are you going to have to have somebody after Lucas the entire time?

COACH BLUDER: Well, I think definitely. You cannot give her a second. If you give her a second, they do a great job of rubbing her off screens, and it's hard to keep somebody on her all the time because of how many screens that she gets, but that's the goal.

Q. When you looked last game, the freshmen didn't get any minutes. Have they developed as quickly as you'd like?

COACH BLUDER: I don't think you can measure it in terms of minutes. Because in the past we've had freshmen play minutes because of necessity, because there was opportunity because of injuries. And this year, thank goodness, we haven't had the injuries, but there hasn't been the opportunity for our freshmen. So I don't think you can really base the amount of minutes they play on the quality of their play, but really on the depth of our team this year.

Q. Have you talked to the team about the record against ranked opponents this year?

COACH BLUDER: We've talked about it. Before the last game we talked about that because Nebraska wasn't ranked, but they were 27th in the latest poll, so we definitely talk about that with them.

Q. What do you say?

COACH BLUDER: Hey, we know how to do this. We have 16 wins this year. Six of them have been against top 25 opponents, so we know that we can do it. We talked about we don't have to go back and change a whole bunch of things. We just have to remember what we did well and keep doing more of that.

Q. As strong as Penn State is, their vulnerability seems to be on the road. Talk about playing at home?

COACH BLUDER: They only have one loss in Big Ten play, and it is on the road. So everybody would prefer playing at home, I think. We certainly want to use it, but our last couple of home games haven't gone the right direction for us.

So we just have to remind ourselves of how good it is to play in Carver-Hawkeye arena, because those opportunities are dwindling, and we have a lot of road games ahead of us.

Q. This past February has been kind of -- the last two years, you didn't lose a game at all in February. What do you do to get that late-season mojo back?

COACH BLUDER: We have a tough February schedule this year. A lot of doing well in February sometimes has to do with who you're playing against as well. But we have a tough February schedule, and we have to remember to keep it light for the players. I think we have to continue to work on building their confidence and keeping them up. Because if we start dwelling on it, it's easy to continue a slide.

But we know -- you know, how good would a Penn State win be for our confidence? How good would it be for our record going into the NCAA Tournament and the Big Ten tournament? It would be enormous. So we have to look at this as a great opportunity.

Q. Coach, I know you try to keep everything positive. But the thought of having a March Regional here, how important is it to be playing in that?

COACH BLUDER: I think it's very important. We'd love to be playing here. Is it the end of the world if we aren't? No. Is it the end of our careers, our seasons, our lives? No. But, yes, that is the goal to be playing here in March and have the opportunity to play in the women's national tournament and have it on our home court. That is the dream.

Q. Did you get an update on Claire?

COACH BLUDER: She's doing well. Claire is doing well and she's coming back and doing some really good things in practice right now.

Q. Is she cleared to play?

COACH BLUDER: Yes.

Q. What are your thoughts on Jaime coming out of her shooting struggles?

COACH BLUDER: Well, she had a pretty good game against Wisconsin. I almost -- it's funny, because you say Jaime Printy's shooting struggles. I don't see her struggling that badly. She had that three that would have tied it up at the end of the game in the last game, that was in and came out.

I guess I have so much confidence in Jamie that sometimes I guess I don't see the struggling part. I think she adds a lot to our team. Not just three-point shooting, but getting to the free-throw line. She is one of the best help defenders I've ever had. And people don't always recognize that.

In our last game she provided help after help after help. You know, since you're not maybe on the ball and doing those things, people don't recognize what she did for us defensively in that game as well. But those are things that don't show up in the record book.

Q. Speaking of Jamie, the finalists for the CLASS Award came out?

COACH BLUDER: I don't even know what that is, sorry.

Q. The Senior CLASS Award. She's one of the ten finalists for that?

COACH BLUDER: I didn't even know that until just now. Thanks for the good news, but happy. Is it a national award? I'm sorry, I don't know anything about it.

Q. It is national, has 10 finalists.

COACH BLUDER: This looks like a regional type of thing. It looks like is it all midwest players? Oh, no, Delaware. Well, it's very impressive. Now that I know about it, that's wonderful. Like I say, I'm sorry. I should have known about this, and I didn't know about it.

It's a great honor to be among the Top 10. Is it something that fans can vote on? Do we know? No.

Q. Fan voting is one of the components.

COACH BLUDER: We need to get the

word out if it's a fan voting thing. I know there are a lot of those awards that are fan voting and if that is the truth, we need to get the word out on that. So the Hawkeye fans will get it on the website, I'm sure and vote for her.

Q. Kind of honors off the field accomplishments too. Leadership, class work, social actions, things like that. What's that say about just kind of all around the person that Jamie is?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, it speaks volumes because she's done a great job in all of those categories. Not only been a great four-year player for us here, but an exceptional student. Does a great job in the classroom, a community servant.

For her, we get a lot of letters or emails from kids that are torn their ACLs, and Jamie is always one that I go to to say, would you write to this kid? Would you give her a word of encouragement? And she's always willing to do that for us.

So I think she enjoys the opportunity to be a role model and to help other kids go through some of the same things that she's been through.

Q. How are they, Penn State, doing so well on defense?

COACH BLUDER: They're just a really good pressure defensive team. And any ball screen they're going to trap, they're going to trap hard. We don't set a ton of ball screens within our offense, so we're probably not going to give them that opportunity as much as other teams do. But they're very good at it, and they're so big and athletic too. But it's just really good on ball pressure defense. They don't play much zone.

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