

**March 16, 2011**



An Interview With:

## **COACH LISA BLUDER**

COACH BLUDER: Well, we just finished practice, and we have one more practice before we leave town. We know Gonzaga is a very good team; and to us it's a shock, and just like to them, that they're even an 11 seed.

The way that the hosting went this year, with all the No. 1s hosting and most of the No. 2s, it took away all the 7, 8, 9 and 10 opportunities, because all those 7, 8, 9, and 10 seeds have to go play at 1 and 2.

So it really pushed Gonzaga into being either a 6 or an 11. They had to be either a 6 or a 11. It was talked about two weeks before the end of the year that they were going to be an 11. They knew it, because that was the only position they really could fit in. Now they're as good as any 6 seed in the country.

We definitely feel like we've got the toughest 6 seed in the country. We're not playing at home like Penn State. We're not playing on a neutral court like Georgia and Oklahoma. We have to travel the farthest than anybody. So we've been dealt a tough blow.

Gonzaga is a great team. They've won 18 straight. They haven't lost at home except for one time to Stanford No. 1 seed in America. That was by a total of six points. They're a high offensive team. They're a high assist team. They have the best point guard in America.

It's a sold-out arena. And it's an arena we don't play in this type of arena. It's a 6,000-seat arena. So it's similar -- it's smaller than the Knapp Center in Des Moines, and we've only played in one of those type of places all year.

So it's an environment we're not used to being in. And that's also a little bit concerning. But having said all that, our players are excited. They're ready to go.

They feel like they played in a similar environment last year, playing at Stanford, and it's

almost a sold-out arena there, smaller gym. Obviously the result wasn't what we wanted there, but we respect Gonzaga. But we know we're going to give them our best shot. And I really feel confident that our players are going to go out there and play well.

### **Q. (Off microphone)**

COACH BLUDER: That's another disadvantage to us, is being in Spokane, it's the farthest traveling 6 seed. For us, for our parents to get there, for fans to get there, it's nearly impossible. And it's very, very expensive. So they've taken away any of our opportunities to grow our program by having our fans and our parents there.

### **Q. Do they remind you of anyone you've seen this season?**

COACH BLUDER: Penn State is the closest team who they remind me of in the way they push the ball. It doesn't matter if it's a steal, if it's a rebound, if it's a made basket, they're pushing the ball down the floor extremely well.

They're No. 1 offense bar none, just to push the ball, push the ball, push the ball, and they're very effective at it.

### **Q. How do you slow that down?**

COACH BLUDER: I think we're going to have to have two in transition back, which takes away one of our offensive rebounds. That's exactly what they want people to do, because then you have less opportunity to rebound.

But we don't have a choice. They're an excellent rebound team. And hopefully picking up their point guard early and making sure that she's contested early will also help slowing her down.

### **Q. Does Vandersloot remind you of anybody?**

COACH BLUDER: Better than Alex Bentley from Penn State. Better offensive player than Alex Bentley. As quick as she is, but a little bigger in size and a little bit better offense player.

**Q. What makes her so good, the assists and --**

COACH BLUDER: She's so fast with the ball. And she makes great decisions. Her passing decisions are really quite -- you are watching film and you catch yourself going, oh, wow, that's the type of player she is. Doesn't surprise me that the place is sold out because she's such an exciting player to watch. She received the award as the Best Point Guard in America, and she definitely deserves that.

**Q. Can you talk about how you can defend them, switch up the zone?**

COACH BLUDER: We typically do, yes.

**Q. Best point guard?**

COACH BLUDER: Best point guard we've seen this year, yes.

**Q. How about the experience that your team got last year in terms of that hostile environment situation?**

COACH BLUDER: It really helps. Last year we were kind of wide eyed, a lot of freshmen going in there never playing in a national tournament before. This year it's our advantage we've been there before. We know what to expect.

We've played in a lot of hostile arenas around the Big Ten. I think we're prepared for that. But so is Gonzaga. This is a team that was in the Sweet 16 last year. They beat North Carolina and Texas A&M to get to the Sweet 16. So they have excellent NCAA experience.

**Q. You mentioned they're a lot like Penn State. Penn State was a team that did something different than a lot of other Big Ten teams and they're hard to figure out. What have you taken from those lessons you learned?**

COACH BLUDER: I think it helps that we've played against that style before, because I think they just shock a lot of teams with how fast they are and how they can transition; and at least we've seen it twice this season already with Penn State.

But, you know, not only are they a good transition team, but their posts, their 4 and 5, are very good. They're athletic kids that can come out and shoot from 17 feet, very comfortably. And so it's not your traditional post-style like we see in the Big Ten either.

**Q. How important is it for Johnson to stay in the game, especially with -- that looks like something that you guys could dominate, perhaps?**

COACH BLUDER: I think that having her in there is very important. I think we need to look to get the ball inside to Morgan. Because we do have a height advantage. We need to try to exploit that.

But Morgan is going to be challenged in the fact she's going to have to play perimeter defense, and she's going to have to play 17 feet away from the basket and be able to contain a drive from there and contest the jump shot from there.

**Q. Obviously she received a number of accolades today. What can you say about her season? And a lot of people will be talking about the Vandersloot in this matchup. She's one of those top 50 players, too, right?**

COACH BLUDER: Right. Vandersloot did make the top 20. John Wooden cut and Kash did not make that cut. But Kash loves challenges. You give her a challenge and watch out, that's when she's at her best. We've given her the challenge. And I think she's very excited about trying to contain Vandersloot and control her assists and her scoring.

And Kash has had such a good senior year, and I could just see -- I just want this so bad for her, for those seniors to go out on a positive note and to feel good about getting a couple NCAA Tournament wins. So that would be just the frosting on the cake for us.

**Q. What does the future look like for Kach? WNBA?**

COACH BLUDER: She'd like that opportunity. She's been invited to a camp that will be in April for a tryout situation for the WNBA.

The spots are getting so limited because the teams are diminishing, and they're only carrying 10 on the roster. So the spots are very limited. If she doesn't make an WNBA team I think she'll have a great career overseas, kind of like Crystal Smith, Crystal Smith has played the last five years overseas, still playing over there. I could see Kash doing something like that. But definitely trying to make the WNBA is the first look that we want to approach.

**Q. You guys are taking a summer trip this year?**

COACH BLUDER: Yes. We're taking a summer trip in August. We are going to Prague and to Paris and playing games against their national teams. And that will be in August, kind of right up before school starts.

**Q. Going to take your incoming freshmen?**

COACH BLUDER: There's a new NCAA rule that incoming freshmen can travel. And so we'll take five incoming freshmen with us.

**Q. All five?**

COACH BLUDER: All five will be in summer school. They'll be in game time league and all five will travel on the trip.

**Q. How big of an advantage is that going into 2012?**

COACH BLUDER: It's big. When you have a large recruiting class like that, there's a lot of learning that has to take place. And we get 10 extra practices before we go on that trip.

And so those 10 practices, just to be able to work with them, that's a lot of time to spend with them that we wouldn't normally get. So that's really good.

And also I think going on a foreign tour, there's nothing that brings camaraderie through a team and being in a foreign country and trying to figure out what people are saying and what the menu says and figure out how much things cost.

So I think that really brings teams together. And when we're bringing such a big influx of freshmen, I think that's the perfect time for this to happen.

**Q. Correct me if I'm wrong, didn't you guys go on a trip before you started this run you're on?**

COACH BLUDER: Yes, we did.

**Q. Do you think it had an impact?**

COACH BLUDER: I really do think it did. That year we were not able to take Kash and Kelsey, the rule wasn't in effect. But we only had two freshmen that year, so it was a little bit easier to get them into our system in the fall.

**Q. You might have partially answered this, but were you shocked that they sold out so quick for that game?**

COACH BLUDER: I heard it was almost sold out two weeks ago. So they knew they were going to be hosting. They knew they had a good team. They've won 18 straight. There's a lot of momentum with this basketball team right now and their fan support.

I guess it doesn't surprise me. And it only seats 6,000, too. That's the thing that concerns us a little bit is that we've not played in an arena with 6,000 seats.

The closest one would be the Knapp Center in Des Moines which holds 7,000, and it certainly wasn't sold out when we played there. It's going to be a very loud environment and very hard to communicate. I think we'll have to make sure that everybody's looking to the bench and really huddling every opportunity to be able to communicate in that kind of environment.

**Q. Did you do anything this week to try to prepare for that?**

COACH BLUDER: You know, we might tomorrow. We haven't done anything thus far as far as bringing in crowd noise to practice, but it's something we're entertaining to do tomorrow morning for our practice before we leave.

**Q. You addressed the team after the selection. Is this going to be kind of a chip-on-the-shoulder type of situation when you go there?**

COACH BLUDER: I think we have to look at it as a chip on the shoulder. For one thing everybody in the whole country thinks we're beat already; we might as well not even go out there. Every media person you talk to thinks we're not -- the team that's going to win is going to be UCLA playing Gonzaga for the next game. So that kind of irritates you as a competitor that everybody's already counted you out.

And then also just the thing -- for us to have to go out clear to Spokane when the other 6 seeds are playing in their backyard, that's frustrating, it's very frustrating to have to play a host school is frustrating.

They could have easily had Gonzaga be a 6 seed. They're that good of a team. They're ranked ahead of us in both polls. They can't help that they play in a weaker conference. They

dominated their conference. They haven't been in a close game for 18 games because they completely dominate their conference.

But they did try to go outside of their conference and play a good non-conference. They played Notre Dame. They played Stanford. They played USC. So they did go out -- they did the things you have to do when you're in a conference like that and you're nonconference and they performed well against those people.

So, again, I just feel like they could have easily been the 6 seed, and they're probably mad because they're not the 6 seed.

**Q. Was the Ole Miss games one of the tapes you saw, and if so, how did they slow them down?**

COACH BLUDER: Actually, we did not get that film. We were not able -- that was not a televised game. We were not able to get that film.

**Q. Is there a blueprint for kind of slowing them down and kind of slowing Vandersloot down?**

COACH BLUDER: Well, I don't know that there's a blueprint for it. I mean, you have to be prepared for that transition and just getting in the mindset that you're going to be in a race. Every time there's a change of possession, you're in a foot race to get down to the other end of the court.

And there's just not a lot of people around the country that played that aggressively the whole game. And so when you're not used to it, I think it can catch teams off guard. So we try to prepare our team for it today. We showed them film. We tried to emulate it in practice with our gray squad.

So, you know, and just putting it in their heads, putting it in their heads that this is going to happen and hopefully it will work for us.

**Q. You're not a terribly deep team. Is that a problem going out there?**

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, I think anytime you're playing a team that gets up and down the floor as many times as this team does, you know, it's more work on your legs. And so that's a concern.

But they're not really that deep either. And so hopefully that will negate a little bit.

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