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An Interview With:

COACH BLUDER

COACH BLUDER: Well, obviously an important week. This in-state rivalry means a lot to both schools. We know that Iowa State is a very good team coming in here, undefeated, ranked 22nd in the country.

I do think we have played a more challenging schedule than they have. They have not played any true road games yet. This will be the first road game for them. But, they are a very, very good basketball team. They have great size with Hallie Christofferson at 6-6, 6-7, and she's playing the best basketball of her career as a senior right now.

Chelsea Poppens, she's an amazing athlete. She is so strong. She's very physical. She's hard to guard. She's averaging five offensive rebounds per game, which is an incredible number. I know she's been out the last couple of games with a concussion, but I fully expect that she'll be back for our game and we are prepared to see her.

Hallie Christofferson, a player that we recruited and we really liked, is their leading scorer, and shooting the ball very well from 3-point range. They have so many people that are shooting the ball really well; it's hard to pick anybody to help guard them.

As a team they are shooting 47 percent from the field, and again, a number of really good 3-point shooters in Hallie Christofferson, and Williamson, as well, doing a great job with that.

So we know it's going to be an intense, emotional game. We are glad that we have had some time to prepare for this game, and we have had a couple of days of practice and I know Iowa

State has had a long time to prepare for this game with us. We expect to have a great crowd, blackout is going to be fun, should be a great environment.

Q. The rivalry, the home team has won 10 of the last 11. Why has that been and do you take a little bit of comfort in that?

COACH BLUDER: I don't take any comfort in it. I wish I did. Do I love playing at home? Absolutely. We love playing in Carver-Hawkeye Arena. It's a great place to play. Our fans are wonderful. And I think that is what has helped so much in this home court is that both teams have really good fan support.

Iowa State, tough place to play. Incredible fan support. Has been for a number of years. Ours has not been quite as good as theirs, but still, it's among the top in the country.

I just think that both teams have really enjoyed playing on their home court and really respond well to playing on their home courts, but you know, does it mean an automatic W? I wish. I know, and I'm smarter than that -- I think I am.

Q. Does the outcome of this affect in-state recruiting?

COACH BLUDER: I used to think that was a bigger deal than it is now. I used to think that that had much more impact on where a girl picked to go to school, and it really doesn't seem to be.

To me it seems more like I'm either closer to this school, or they grew up a Hawkeye fan, or they grew up a Cyclone fan or I just have a better connection with this person rather than who won the series.

And we only play once a year, too, and maybe that makes a difference. It just seems to me like people are kind of either Hawkeye supporters or they are Cyclone supporters.

Q. Coach Fennelly said talking about

you this morning, he said, I'm not going to lie and say we are best friends; but there's a mutual respect there. Would you say that's accurate on your end, as well?

COACH BLUDER: I would say that's definitely accurate. He's done a great job.

There's no doubt that what they have done with their program since he has been there has been amazing as far as the fan support, the winning, their ability to get to the NCAA Tournament, the type of kids he's getting in that program and where it's come from.

You know, he took it from nothing and made it a very good program. We are not going to go out for dinner together tonight or anything like that.

Q. Who among the coaching profession would you say are people like that --

COACH BLUDER: That I hang out with?

Q. That you consider close friends.

COACH BLUDER: You know, a lot of them have passed on, not in died, but retired from coaching. It used to be that you had that little bit of a sorority more in the older days. It's not like that as much anymore. There's not really people that you 'hang out' with from the coaching profession right now in the Division I ranks. But you know, I used to be good friends with a lot of them that have kind of left the landscape, so to speak.

That's not a big deal to me. I'm not like -- I'm not going to be voted the most popular coach by the other coaches around the country. I kind of -- I'm a person that's pretty tunnel-vision and I really concentrate on Iowa Hawkeyes and my own family and that's where I really want to spend my time, is with my Hawkeyes and my family and having relationships; and developing those relationships with other coaches takes time, just like any other relationship, and I'm just not willing to give that time up at this time in my life.

Q. Can you talk about the progression that Theairra Taylor has made from her injury?

COACH BLUDER: I think her best days are yet to come. I don't think you guys have seen them yet. I think Theairra has grown immensely since she has come off of from her injury. I think she's taking more pride in her defense and rebounding right now and her ability to get to the hoop. But Theairra, again, she's -- the best is still yet to come from Theairra on the court.

I just have so much respect for her for how she battled back. None of us in this room can understand what it's like to go through three ACL surgeries and mentally and physically battle back to become a starting Division I athlete. That's almost unheard of, and so I have so much admiration for her for that.

But again, I kind of try to push that aside. I don't want to think about it and I don't want her thinking about it. I just want her thinking about, what can I do in the next play and what can I do in the next time down the court and not think about, to where I've been to where I am now; but to where I am today.

Q. And the match-ups she'll be facing tomorrow in Williamson, can you talk about that?

COACH BLUDER: I have a lot of confidence in Theairra playing defense. We gave her Jacqui Kalin from UNI who I thought was a very good player, and her and Melissa Dixon did a super job defending her.

So I think Theairra will step up to any assignment I give her and welcome it.

Q. Have you ever worn black uniforms at home before?

COACH BLUDER: No, we have not. But, it's a blackout, and I hope our fans have the word out to wear black, otherwise they will come in here wondering what is going on.

So we are trying to get involved in that. We are trying to be a part of the blackout with the black.

Q. Can you talk about the interstate rivalry in general and how important it is to your team?

COACH BLUDER: It's been a strong rivalry among everybody in the state. Every one of us in the state, and all four schools, want to have that mythical state championship. We would be lying if we said we didn't; all of us want it.

It's important just for pride. You know, again, is it important -- I'm not sure, but it's important because you really want to represent the state and you want to be the school that's superior in the state.

Q. Will Christofferson and Morgan Johnson see a lot of each other tomorrow

night?

COACH BLUDER: You know, they have so many other big people to guard, that that's what makes it so hard to guard Iowa State is they have an unbelievable amount of height.

So Christofferson is playing more of a wing player right now. She can play power forward and she can play center but she's playing more of a wing.

Q. What is most encouraging for you in, match-ups or anything like that?

COACH BLUDER: Well, I feel like we have prepared ourselves really well. I mean, we have played against great competition.

We played four teams in the top-30 in the country. This will be our fifth team. So I think you get better by playing against good opponents and so I feel like we have prepared ourselves well.

We have the home-court advantage. Morgan Johnson is very hard to guard, and it requires people to alter what they really want to do to come up with a game plan against her.

So it will be interesting to see what they do, whether they come up with a game plan for her but they have to come up with something.

Q. Morgan's been so been consistent this year, 18, 19, 14, 20; is it hard not to take her for granted sometimes?

COACH BLUDER: You know, maybe it is for some people. I don't take her for granted because I know how hard she works. I see it every day. I see the pain in her face every day and how hard she works, and I think of next year, which I know I shouldn't be thinking, when she's not around.

So I don't take her for granted. I enjoy every minute and every game with her.

Q. The double-double string, is that something you look at? Will that be one of the biggest challenges for her?

COACH BLUDER: That's not really a concern for us. It's never been a goal to have a string of double-doubles, or that she comes in and gets double-doubles. Our goal is to win the game, and if Morgan scores one point and gets one rebound and we win the game, she'll be okay with that and I'll be okay with that.

Q. Going back to last week, between you guys and UNI, there were eight players from Minnesota -- why do you think Iowa is

such a desirable destination or high school players?

COACH BLUDER: Well, for one thing there's only one Division I school in the state of Minnesota and there are four Division I schools in the State of Iowa.

So there's less competition for the kids up there, and it's a bigger-populated state. We can sell them on coming south, going to the warm climate. We are the next-closest state to them, most the time. Sometimes Wisconsin is, depending where they are located.

But we are a pretty darned close state and we are a good program with good tradition, and again, there's less competition because there's only one Division I school up there.

Q. What's the talent level like in the State of Iowa now compared to some of the other states around here?

COACH BLUDER: You know, we have always, I think every year, we have some really good players come out of the state.

Do we have a plethora of good players? No. We are not a state that really has 20 Division I players coming out of our state but we have a couple every year that are very good but the problem is with four Division I schools, you are all vying for those same players and it makes the competition for those players very, very strong, and then obviously everybody else coming in to get those players if they are that quality, as well.

You know we don't have the abundance of Division I talent in this state but we certainly have some every year.

Q. Do you have an eye on how many in-state players Iowa State has, UNI, Drake or --

COACH BLUDER: No, we really don't. We don't keep numbers on that or look and see who has the most or the least or anything like that.

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