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An interview with:

COACH BLUDER

COACH BLUDER: I don't think right now we're on the top of too many people's radar screens. And that's okay because really the last two years we haven't been there. We've ended up at the top or toward the top of the Big Ten Conference.

So this year, obviously, is going to be a year of growth, and how quickly we can grow as a team is going to determine where we end up in the Big Ten Conference by the end of this year.

There are obvious shoes to fill due to graduation. Any time you lose five seniors, and in our case ten over the past two years, people are going to wonder about your team and how quickly you're going to grow and to come together as a team again. And people are going to question how good you're going to be.

But, I think we have plenty of reasons to be optimistic and plenty of reasons to expect this team to be good by year's end. One of those is that we do return three starters from last year's team or three people that started for some part of the year.

We return Kachine Alexander, second team all-Big Ten. Kachine was the second highest rebounder in the Big Ten Conference at 5'9". I think Kachine is probably one of the most exciting players to watch in the Big Ten Conference. She's very much looking forward to her junior year and having that experience of a full season of Big Ten play underneath her belt.

We return JoAnn Hamlin, our only senior. JoAnn is in her fifth year of basketball now, so she has a lot of maturity. She is very strong. She is going to move to the five position, the center position for us. And I think that her maturity and

her leadership are going to help us immensely throughout this year.

We return Kamille Wahlin, who burst on the scene last year in the Big Ten Conference, and we'll be moving her to the point guard position from the off guard position. That's her more natural position. And I think nobody would argue with me that she had a tremendous freshman year being named to the all-freshman team in the Big Ten Conference. She just continues to elevate her play. I'm very excited about her future.

Then we add to the mix that we have five freshmen, a very good recruiting class. Led by Jaime Printy from Linn-Mar High School. I feel like we've been talking about Jaime for a long time. Jaime committed to us as a freshman, and it's wonderful to finally see her in an Iowa uniform after talking about it for so long.

Jaime adds a whole other dimension to our team as a deep, long-range shooter. I compare her to a Mary Berdo type of range. I think any time you have that type of range, it really opens up your offense underneath as well. So, I'm excited about having Jaime in uniform.

Another Iowan will join us, Trisha Nesbitt from Ames, Iowa. And Trisha will back up our point guard position. And, obviously, Trisha had a very successful high school career playing in the state championship last year and receiving many postseason awards.

We signed three women from out of state. One, Morgan Johnson from Kansas City, Missouri was named the Scholar Athlete of the Year in Kansas City. And got to throw out the first pitch at a Kansas City Royals' game and is excited about being a Hawkeye. She will do a tremendous job inside for us. She's the tallest member of our team now at 6'4", and I expect her to contribute as a freshman, as well.

We also brought in Theairra Taylor, another highly ranked player from St. Paul Central High School. And Theairra is a wing player, could

play the two or the three position. Very athletic as most of you probably know, Theairra tore her ACL in her last high school game, unfortunately.

And we really didn't know what her status was going to be for this year. And we don't completely know at this point where she's going to -- how much she's going to be able to contribute this year. But, I feel much more comfortable with it right now than I did a couple months ago. She's come back from her rehab very, very well. So it's exciting to see what she's going to add for our basketball team.

Then our last recruit is Gabriella Machado. And Gabby is from Detroit, Michigan. Pontiac North High School. Will play the power forward for us, and at 6'1" brings a little bit of -- I don't know if a woman likes to have broad shoulders. I'm not something that they really like to be labeled. But she brings a little bit of strength and just a good size into the middle for us, as well.

So we're excited about blending those five women into our team. I love freshmen. I think freshmen bring out the teacher in any Coach. I love the youthful enthusiasm. If you read Pat Riley's book, he talked about the rise of the innocents and they don't know what they're getting into. And that can be a bad thing, but it can also be a good thing. I'm going to look at it as a very good thing to have these five quality freshmen join our team.

This year's schedule, again, extremely difficult. Fifteen of our games will be against teams that were in last year's postseason play. We open up with our Hawkeye Challenge. We're bringing in UCLA, we're bringing in Illinois State who is winner of the Missouri Valley Conference last year, and bringing in Santa Clara for that opening tournament here in Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

We'll also be hosting Kansas, a team that was runner up in last year's WNIT's. A very good basketball team, and we'll be hosting them here in Carver-Hawkeye Arena. Our Big Ten ACC challenge includes Boston College. So that will be a great home match-up for us.

Then we'll also be hosting South Dakota State University. They ended up last year ranked 16th in the country, so another very, very challenging schedule.

Also, we could be playing West Virginia in the tournament at Reno, a WNIT qualifier, and been in the tournament many, many times. So, again, a great schedule. I'm excited for you to meet this team downstairs.

Q. I noticed nine of the first 14 games are at home. You have to feel good about that. Then the second half of the season, only 15. Seven of 15 are at home. Just your thought on that?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, I think with a young team it's always good to have the comfort of playing at home and not having the wear and tear of traveling. So I think that's a very good thing for us.

Once again you've analyzed our schedule even more than I have. So I guess I didn't realize the end of the season woes.

Q. You have Wendy and Kristi were go-to outside shooters last year. Do you have someone who can fill their shoes right now?

COACH BLUDER: It's one of the most unproven things on our team. Do I think we have the weapons to replace them? I do think we have some really good three point shooters on our team. Kamilie Wahlin showed that she was very capable last year. That is a specialty of Jaime Printy's that she can shoot there. Hannah Draxten has worked on her outside shot this summer, and as well as Kachine Alexander. One knock people had on Kachine was her outside shooting last year. I'm excited for everybody to see how much she's worked hard to develop that part of her game.

We're not proven. There is no doubt about that. I love having those three-point shooters like Kristi and Wendy the past several years to count on. But we have to develop new players to count on.

Q. When Jaime committed to you at 15, how much did that excite you that you had a player that was that excited about being a Hawkeye?

COACH BLUDER: You know, that's kind of one of our goals, one of our missions is that we want girls growing up in the state to dream about being an Iowa Hawkeye. And for Jaime that was her dream. Now for her to fulfill that dream and continue to grow on it, it's really gratifying. I just want to continue developing this program so that a lot more girls growing up in the state have that dream.

Q. It seems that you've been talking about it forever. You haven't been able to talk to us about her though?

COACH BLUDER: That's true, good point.

Q. Can you tell us what she brings to the team and what it was like recruiting her and knowing she was going to be here and seeing her develop through high school?

COACH BLUDER: She played the point guard position in high school. We're not going to have her at that position here at the university. We're going to play her at the two and three position. But at 5'10", she's a good-sized guard, and she has the experience in ball handling. That's going to help us with breaking presses and bringing the ball up the floor to fast break quickly.

But, the thing that really distinguishes her from other people is her ability to shoot the outside ball. I mean, she's not a 19-foot shooter. She's a 22 and 23-foot shooter and that can really open things up for you.

Q. You mentioned JoAnn's going to play the five. Who are you looking at at the four, and did playing Wendy there last year change your view on how you want to play that?

COACH BLUDER: It certainly can. We're just trying to get the five best players out on the floor. Not always label them. I think you have to have a point guard and center out there. But the rest of them, get your best players out on the floor.

I think we did that last year and it was very successful for us. So are we going to experiment with that this year? Absolutely. I don't think right now we have to determine two, three, four, who is going to be in those positions.

I want it to be a battle. And there's a lot of people that have the possibility of battling for those positions.

Q. Is Kachine ready to lead this team?

COACH BLUDER: I think she is. She's always been an extremely hard worker. I think Kachine is a person, as you can tell on the floor, she plays with a lot of passion, a lot of emotion and sets the tone to work hard in practice. So, I think that those are all things that you expect in your upperclassmen and your leaders.

Q. Does Kamille's experience and what she was able to do as a freshman help this group of freshmen coming in?

COACH BLUDER: I think when freshmen see they're coming into a program and they see

last year there was a freshman starter, it opens up their eyes as to what they can do.

If it's a program that's never had a freshman that's been an impact player or never had a starter, I think it would be a dismal feeling as a freshman to come in and say, Oh, Geez, nobody's ever done that before. To know this program has produced great freshmen and youth freshmen quite extensively is good for us for recruiting and gives a lot of hope to those younger players.

Q. You mentioned freshmen contributing. Four years ago you brought in five freshmen, and that class seemed to be really special over the last four years. How do you compare this year's class of five freshmen to that class?

COACH BLUDER: I think it's very similar. I think that bringing in five, bringing in one at almost every position, I guess the proof will be in the pudding in the end on how well they stand up to the comparison of those five. That was a special group of women.

Do I think this is a special group? Absolutely. But now they've got four years of work ahead of them.

Q. You talk about this team at the end of the year you think you can be really good. What are your expectations before Christmas?

COACH BLUDER: You know, as far as a record, I wouldn't want to go out and predict anything like that. I think that we just have to worry about growing every single day. Getting better every single day in practice. When you have a young team, there are some ups and downs that you face. It's whether you can come back from those lows that is going to make you a good team in the long run. So, I just want to really get better every single practice, and for them to continue to grow every day. I think good things can happen by the end of the year.

Q. Looking at the Big Ten this season, two teams mainly being mentioned in the rankings, Ohio State, and the other team Michigan State. The Big Ten computer we only have to play them once. Michigan State here and Ohio State on the road. Just your thoughts on the Big Ten schedule?

COACH BLUDER: Well, I think it's

favorable for us. But at the same time, it's always nice to play against great competition and get RPI points. So last year Ohio State comes in here ranked 13th best in the country, we beat them. Obviously, that's a great thing for the selection committee to note. It's a great opportunity to play ranked teams on your home floor.

So bringing Michigan State into Carver is a great thing. I don't know how good it is to play in Columbus, so that is a tough place to play. But I think Purdue when you talk about top of the Big Ten, you've got to include them. I'm surprised -- you've researched those polls better than I have -- that they're not also included because I think they're going to have an outstanding team as well.

Q. Your expectations for Kelly Krei this year?

COACH BLUDER: Right now Kelly's got a little stress fracture issues going on so she's missed a little bit of preseason.

I've got a lot of faith in Kelly. She's a great athlete. She's a competitor. She works extremely hard. Really Kelly got lost a little bit when we shifted our offense last year. We were in four out one end set we shifted two a three out two end set, a third of the way through the Big Ten season and that hurt Kelly.

I think this year we'll be very versatile in our offense, and just having the best players out there whether we're in a four out or three out. I think that's going to help Kelly.

But I think you'll see more production out of Kelly this year.

Q. Is it a stress fracture in the foot or the leg? Do you think she'll be back ready by the start of the season?

COACH BLUDER: In her leg, I hope I'm saying that correctly. I think that she'll be back by the beginning of the season when we have games or when we have practice? I think she'll be back when we have games.

Q. You have at least seven Sunday games. That was a big thing. Last year you didn't have quite as many?

COACH BLUDER: Sunday games are tremendous for us. For people to be able to come out. It's a family day. And this is a great place to bring your family. I think our women provide great entertainment at a reasonable price. They're super role models. They're very accessible after the games as far as getting autographs.



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So for us to have seven games, I think it would be a boost to our attendance and generate some new fans and some young fans.

Q. Can you tell us about Morgan Johnson?

COACH BLUDER: I don't know if she pitched a strike. But you know Morgan, for some of you who saw her playing in the game time leagues this summer, I didn't see her out there. But she works hard. That's the thing you love about her. She just works hard all of the time.

She's got, obviously, great size. She's mobile. She has good hands. She's getting stronger, and that was a point of emphasis for us this summer is to try to get her to be a little bit bulkier and a little bit stronger. I think those things our strength Coach J.C. Moreau has done a terrific job with her this summer in helping her develop those things.

Morgan is just a joy to Coach. She really is. She's a great student. Valedictorian of her high school. President Mason teaches a class on campus here for 30 freshmen once a year. You have to be invited to be in that class, and Morgan was invited to be in that class. Just shows you the type of credentials that she has.

She has high aspirations. She wants to be a doctor. She's just a very driven woman that I think will have a great career here.

Q. How big of a role do you think she'll play here? Will she be starting or part of the rotation to start out with?

COACH BLUDER: I definitely think she's going to be a part of our rotation. So I think that she'll have some good minutes right off the bat.

Q. Will you move JoAnn to the four at times and put her in the five?

COACH BLUDER: That's definitely a possibility. That is definitely something that we can play with. It depends on who emerges as the Top 5 players by November.

Q. The Big Ten last year in free throw shooting, only Indiana got to the line more than Iowa. So this season, the Big Ten, very rugged league. Your thoughts on the importance of getting to the foul line?

COACH BLUDER: That is something we stress in our offense. Last year we were not only

leading the Big Ten, but we were fifth best in the United States.

It's something we want to get to the line a lot, because we think we're very good at scoring when we get there. That will not change this year. It will still be a point of emphasis for us to penetrate hard and draw the foul.

Q. Talk about JoAnn's maturity? And talk about how much you're going to be relying on her as a leader with such a young team and exactly how important will she be here?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, JoAnn's role is crucial to our team. When you're the only senior, you can't look next to you and say help me out with this situation, with your teammates and fellow seniors. You're the only one.

So there is a lot of responsibility with that. Luckily JoAnn's a little bit older having sat out that year. Whenever you're in those situations, even that extra year can help you in that decision making process and how to lead your team.

I think also this means a lot to Jo. I think seniors have a different sense, a level of intensity that they want to be successful. They realize this is their last go around. So I think that Jo having to do it by herself is a tough task. But I think that she is a person that is very capable of doing that.

Q. How has she handled it?

COACH BLUDER: You know, I don't even think she knows there has been a position change. Those are things we sometimes don't share with them all the time. You know, JoAnn doesn't care if she plays the one, two, three, four, five, as long as she's able to contribute to us having a successful year. So I think she'll be very comfortable wherever she is on the floor.

Q. Why has Jo never matched the production she had in her freshman year?

COACH BLUDER: Injury last year. She was having a really nice year for us last year. She had a severe ankle sprain. Missed six games. Was out three weeks. Those are tough to come back from. That was just taken out of her control last year.

You know, maybe the Big Ten's a tougher conference, so I don't know.

Q. Having Jane Meyer on the NCAA selection committee help her?

COACH BLUDER: I don't think it helps. I think it's a non-issue. When they were discussing

us at the end of the year, I hope that we're on the board and everybody's discussing us. You know. She leaves the room anyway, so I don't think it really is. I think it's a non-issue for us being in the tournament.

Q. What are realistic expectations for this team? Shouldn't this team be expected to make a NCAA run or will it take a while to rebuild?

COACH BLUDER: I think you look at our team, it is a rebuilding year. You lose five seniors, you lose ten players over the last two years. We're a young team. We have nine freshmen, sophomores and three junior and seniors. So a very young basketball team.

You know, is this a team that can make a run in the NCAA Tournament? You know, we just want to first of all get there. That is the first goal, then we'll see what happens at the end of the year. That just seems like such a long ways away from now. You know, but I think our first goal has to be to be there.

Q. That's what I'm asking. Is it realistic to expect this team to make it there?

COACH BLUDER: Absolutely. I believe that we can make that field. You know, there are a lot of things that can happen between now and then as far as keeping your players healthy and I think any time it always requires a little luck. You've got to be able to win those close games of the take care of the home court. So there's a lot that lies between now and that point in March. Do we have the potential to make it? I think we do.

Q. Is one of the challenges of a young team not letting the young kids get too high when you get a couple streaks going or get too low when you get to the bottom a couple times?

COACH BLUDER: I think that's a challenge for everybody. Including coaches and all players, regardless of your age. The freshmen just don't have any idea. The season is so much longer for them. They have so many different challenges because everything is absolutely brand-new to them. They have no idea.

They've never played in arenas that are hostile. They've never been on planes to travel to games before. So there are a lot of things that they have to adjust to. Just not even talking about

the game itself, you know, the speed of the game, the physical style of the game. How officials call it at the college level. You know, they've never played in a game that lasted 40 minutes before. So it's a whole new thing for them.

Q. You and your staff started the tenth year at Iowa. Just your thoughts, your reflections? Does it seem like yesterday or just your thought on your tenth season here?

COACH BLUDER: I have a good ruler in what I started here because my daughter was born right before I game here. So Emma's now 9. So I have that measuring stick all the time of my children and how fast they're growing and how fast the years have gone by.

But I've been very thankful. My staff here has been absolutely tremendous. For me to have, you know, Jan Jensen and Jenni Fitzgerald here with me the entire time that I've been here. You know, bringing Shannon Gage back after she was here as director of basketball operations has been a great addition to our staff.

Now we brought in Abby Emmert as our director of basketball operations, one of our own players, and bringing her back to our staff. I'm just very thankful that we've had the group to work with that we have. It's obviously a great place.

Q. Is Kachine one of the Top 5 players in the Big Ten right now?

COACH BLUDER: In my mind she is. You know, I haven't sat and looked at who everybody else returns and all that sort of thing. So in my mind she is. Just think of that statistic. You're 5'9" and the second best rebounder in this conference. To me that's absolutely amazing, so we'll have to see. But I think she definitely has the potential to be there.

Q. Going back to Abby. Having her being the director of basketball relations, how does that benefit you?

COACH BLUDER: It benefits the team because I think they can look to her as an example. She's been there. She's lived it for four years. She knows exactly what they're going through. She's not so far displaced in age that she can remember what it's like to be a player. I think that's good for us as a staff to have that voice that's reminding us of the type of issues that on our players are facing.

I think she's a great example. Obviously, she was a member of the Big Ten championship

team. She was the captain of that team. So I think having her back is a very nice asset to our staff and to our program.

Q. As you work on individual things, are you able to get Hannah to catch and shoot the way Kristi and Wendy could?

COACH BLUDER: We've been working on it. We've also worked on her shot that was up in the air. You know, she could shoot it and I could say a prayer before it hit the rim. My prayer is a lot shorter now from her release. So I think we've improved on that quite a bit.

So she's working on it. I think it's gotten a lot quicker, that catch-and-shoot and release. That's something we work with all of our players.

Now do they pick it up in freshmen year? Not necessarily. Sometimes it takes a little longer for people to change their shooting style. Sometimes you don't want to mess with that during their freshman season, you wait until the off-season, which is what we did with Hannah. Thank you very much.

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