

December 1, 2010



An interview with:

COACH BLUDER

COACH BLUDER: All right, it's challenge week for us. It's kind of unusual to have both of these games right next to each other. They're such important games for us because with the Big Ten/ACC challenge, and the Big Ten/Big 12 challenge. I think the nation really looks at these games. These are great matchups especially this early in the season.

We're excited to start the challenge week. I think our team feels good about themselves right now at 7-0. I know North Carolina feels good about themselves. They're 7-0 as well.

It's our first true road game of the year. Everybody else we've played on the road has been in a neutral environment. So this will present some different challenges for us that we haven't really had to face up to this point.

They are obviously a very good team, ranked 14th in the country. They're a very balanced scoring team like we are. They're a very big team. They're athletic. They're fast. They do a good job winning in their home environment. So we know this is a tough challenge.

We also told our players that North Carolina has a great reputation, and everybody thinks about them. But Michael Jordan's not wearing a jersey anymore, and he's not playing for the women's team.

So I think we need to go in there understanding that we have an opportunity. An opportunity to really open people's eyes across America with a signature win for our program.

So we're just looking at this as a great opportunity. We also need to not go in there stressed out that we have to win this game. We just need to go in and play great disciplined

basketball, good Iowa basketball, And whatever happens will happen. We really don't have a whole lot to lose going into this game. We have everything to gain in my opinion.

Then, of course, coming back and facing Kansas State is another great opportunity for us. Somebody from the Big 12 conference. I think it's tremendous that the administration here has picked that as Buck Night. Hopefully we'll get a good crowd. We usually do for dollar day.

So I think that's a super opportunity they've given us. And of course Hy-Vee and what they've done supporting our program will give us a great home court environment for that game against Kansas State on Sunday.

Q. North Carolina from the ACC Kansas State from the Big 12. Do they remind you of any of the teams you play in the Big Ten?

COACH BLUDER: Somebody else asked me that question. And I really can't think of anybody else from the Big Ten that North Carolina reminds me of. The closest one would probably be Michigan State, but they're much quicker than Michigan State. But that athletic style, it's kind of maybe a combination of Penn State's quickness and then Michigan State's size. So it's maybe a combination of those two teams.

But I feel like we've done a good job this year in playing against some very athletic teams early, and I think that will help us with this game.

Q. When you look at these next three games over eight days, two of them are rated and one just outside of the rankings. What is the opportunity here?

COACH BLUDER: It's an important stretch for us. Obviously, like you bring up the Iowa State game the following week is so important with recruiting, I mean, a number of things, fan support, national rankings. Just an

important -- it's an important game for us.

But we need to concentrate one game at a time with my team. But, of course, I think everybody else on the outside gets excited thinking about this three-game stretch. But it's important we stay focused in one game and really put everything, all of our effort into this North Carolina game to begin with.

Q. Is it too early in the season to think about RPI and what these wins could potentially mean?

COACH BLUDER: I think for players it is. For coaches, it's not. We always understand the significance of playing these type of people and what it can do for our RPI at the end of the year.

Personally I don't talk about that with my team because I don't want them clouding -- they probably say what does RPI stand for? They probably wouldn't have any idea. That's okay. They don't need to think about that stuff. I'd rather they think about how to make a three-point shot.

Q. Have you looked to see where you are RPI-wise?

COACH BLUDER: No.

Q. Realtime RPI has you up three or four. What's that say about who you've played so far?

COACH BLUDER: I think it's -- who we've played obviously it's good. Obviously it's good being ranked that high in the RPI, and that surprises me, quite honestly. I didn't know that.

But I think it's going to keep getting better because the win against Virginia Tech, we're going to get all those ACC points as the year goes on and they play in that conference. Same with North Carolina. We'll get all of those points and now two Big 12 opponents.

So it's really good the people that we've been playing against, I think. It's just going to help us as the year progresses.

Q. Is the opponent more important than the result? Is it more important to play North Carolina and those schools than to beat North Carolina and those schools?

COACH BLUDER: The most important thing is to win. That is definitely the most important thing to do. But a loss doesn't hurt you as much when you're playing against a great RPI opponent. So then you're going to at least gain all of their

opponents' opponents and going on with the RPI. But a win is the most important thing.

Q. When you look at the starting lineup and the balance there is, how important is that to this team some?

COACH BLUDER: For our team or North Carolina?

Q. Your team?

COACH BLUDER: Our team. The balance is great for us because nobody can key on any one person on our team. Nobody can say, oh, let's stop Kamille tonight. There is no way you can do that with our team because somebody else can really hurt you.

So I love that about our team. And I love that if Morgan gets more involved, it helps us open up the outside so that balance is really a good thing for us.

Q. You mentioned going into North Carolina with not a lot to lose or something like that. I mean, have you put your thumb on the attitude of the players how are they feeling going into this?

COACH BLUDER: They know it's a challenge. We're 7-0 right now, but we can be so much better. That is almost the exciting part. We're 7-0 and playing some pretty good basketball.

But, wow, you look at the film and we can cure that. We can cure this. We can take care of that, and that's exciting because we can get a lot better than where we are right now.

I guess every team in America should be saying that right now. Nobody wants to be playing their best basketball right now. But we can point our finger at some things in our offense and say, hey, this is something we can get better at. I think that excites our team.

But they know going into this that this is a challenge. They understand that. But I don't think they're scared of it either.

Q. How did the James Madison comeback affect their confidence?

COACH BLUDER: That's so good for us. To be in that situation where we're behind significantly, down in double figure numbers, and then we're not shooting the ball well, yet still come back and win and win through defense. We didn't

let them score a field goal in the last nine and a half minutes of the game. That is a good rebounding team. We did a good job on the boards in the second half.

So even though we're not even winning with our strength there, I think that gives our team a lot of confidence all right, we're down ten, but we can still do it. So the more times you can put yourself in those situations and as long as you can come out successful in the end, it helps you.

Q. Jaime said your defense is a lot better this year. How so?

COACH BLUDER: I think our freshmen are much stronger than they were last year. That enables it them to be more physical. It enables them to be quicker and sustain a stance and stay in good defensive position for a longer time.

So I think by virtue of them being freshmen to sophomores and working hard in the weight room all during the off-season has made them better defensive players.

I think we've also really taken it as a challenge upon ourselves. We were disappointed in our defense last year. We thought you know our offense was pretty good last year. Can our offense get a whole lot better? You know, maybe not. But one area we can improve on is our defense.

So we took it to heart as a team and a staff that if we're going to improve and be a better basketball team next year, the easiest way for us to do that is to be a better defensive team. I just think a lot of them have taken it to heart.

Q. Are you going to play a lot more player-to-player defense because of the improvements?

COACH BLUDER: Yes, but we'll play whatever we need to play. I'm not sold on I want to play player -- I want to play whatever is going to work for us. I want to play whatever is going to help us win. I want to have confidence in both our players and confidence in our zone, so that we have both weapons to use against people. I like being able to keep people off guard and not know what kind of defense that we'll be in coming out of that timeout.

Q. It seems like maybe you've been able to call more changes on the court and not have to sit in the zone. Are you fresher? Are you able to do some things you weren't able to do last year or not necessarily?

COACH BLUDER: You know, I think that we are a little bit fresher now that we're getting Hannah and Kelly back and having confidence in Megan Considine, so that gives us 10 deep where we didn't have that luxury last year.

I think that helps our players as well. It gives them the confidence that they can work a little bit harder, and expend a little bit more energy on the defensive end knowing that they have people on the bench that can help them out.

Q. Playing two really good conferences, how do you think the Big Ten stacks up top to bottom with the ACC and Big 12?

COACH BLUDER: Where I see us making a big jump is the bottom part of our conference. I think the bottom part of our conference is so much stronger than what it was five, six, 7 seven years ago. I think that is what's going to make the big difference in these challenges now.

I think the top of our conference was always really good, as well as the top of the Big 12 and the ACC. But where I see us is now as a whole I think we're much stronger than where we used to be. And that's, I think, going to pay off on these challenges.

Q. For so long the ACC was thought of as the women's best basketball conference. Do you think the other conferences have gained or surpassed the ACC?

COACH BLUDER: I think the ACC and the Big 12 have both done a great job. Yeah, I think they have. I think that they've really been challenged the SEC, and I think people fear probably those other two conferences a little bit more right now.

Q. Can you talk a little bit about North Carolina's offensive rebounding and how you can curtail that a little bit?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, their offensive rebounding is amazing. They're 22 offensive rebounds a game. They've outrebound their opponents by 20 rebounds a game.

Now they haven't played a lot of opponents either though. The strongest team they've played against is Illinois, and Illinois played them really well for the first half of that game. Then the second half got away from them.

But they're so athletic and they're big.

That's what we talk about with our team, let's not get into a jumping contest with them because we've got to go fundamentals.

When we play in this game, that is going to be the key to a Hawkeye victory, executing fundamentals, making sure we box out. We don't jump next to them. We get that position and make that contact and get in the positioning to draw some over the back calls, use fakes on our passes. Step and meet our passes, because fundamentals are going to win us that game.

We're not going to win because we're bigger, stronger, faster. We're not going to win that game. We'll win because we execute better on the fundamental side.

Q. Earlier you were talking about you see a lot that your team can still improve upon and you said that's exciting. What are some of those things that you feel like your team needs to improve on to be successful against North Carolina?

COACH BLUDER: I think we can crash better than we are. I think we're relying on Kachine to crash a little more for the whole team instead of four people crashing the boards. We'd like to send four to the boards. We can do a lot better job there.

But other things are more technical within our offense. They're just how we're cutting, you know, using fakes and timing, working together. Those type of things within our offense that we can put our finger on that we can get better at.

Q. How important is that defensive versatility that you were talking about going into this next stretch of games, especially North Carolina?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, I think that you have to have more than one weapon to rely on. I think it helps us. Because if one thing's not working, we can change it up or maybe change the way they're playing based on our defense, making changes with our defense. So it helps, it definitely helps.

Q. Some parts of your bench turned the corner in the last game?

COACH BLUDER: I think Kalli Hansen definitely gained some confidence there. Another person, I can never think of her as a bench player, is Kelsey Cermak. And I don't think of her as a bench player because she's playing so many

minutes for us and she's playing at the four and the five.

But she is doing a really good job for us. She hit one of our only two threes in the James Madison game. But she hit some clutch free throws for us. She's really been an important part of our success. I think sometimes she gets really overshadowed.

Q. I know you're thinking one at a time here, but tell me a little about Kansas State and how you match up with them?

COACH BLUDER: I really don't know anything about Kansas State other than they're undefeated right now. I haven't watched film on them yet, and I don't watch film on the next opponent until after this one is over.

My staff has. You know, Jenni Fitzgerald has watched Kansas State. So she's very well versed on them. But I'm really not.

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