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An interview with:

COACH BLUDER

COACH BLUDER: From bobbleheads to South Dakota. This little stretch has me a little bit nervous just because playing three games in five days. It is very easy to get motivated when you're playing is Kansas State or North Carolina or Iowa State.

Unfortunately, you're playing South Dakota State which doesn't have the name recognition as those other schools do, and South Dakota State gave us a great game here at our place last year. It was about a one-point game, with about three and a half minutes to play. We did end up winning by 12, but it was a very physical game.

It's a game I remember really well because Theairra Taylor tore her ACL in that game. They are much stronger on their home floor. They're 4 and 5, and, again, I don't like that record. I don't like it.

They've played against good competition. Kansas State -- they were beating Kansas State on Kansas State's home floor up until the 4-minute mark. So they only ended up losing that game by five points.

Then last week they got beaten pretty badly by UNI, And I've seen that game. UNI played very well in that game. It just makes me nervous going up to play them at their place. I think we have to make sure that our heads are on straight, and we go in there fully focused like we did when we played Iowa State and Kansas State. You saw it last night in the Big Ten.

Minnesota goes to Alabama A&M, and plays at their place and comes out with a 10-point loss. So it's one of those games that we need to

win and we should win, but we've got to go up and be fully focused in order to get the win.

They're a team that's picked to finish second in the Summit League. They returned three starters from last year. They do have another game before they play us, they play Arizona State tomorrow night.

So, of these three games, two of them are on the road, two of them are in-state rivals, and so there are a lot of things that I think make coaches nervous this time of year especially when players are anxious to get home for a little holiday break.

Q. How long ago was that series scheduled? How many years back?

COACH BLUDER: We just scheduled it three years ago, the year before we started it.

Q. So home and home?

COACH BLUDER: It was just a home and home, that's correct.

Q. Do you like doing home at homes like that outside of the challenges of the in-state games?

COACH BLUDER: I would rather play at home all of our games, but for budget reasons, you can't. You do need to get some road experience too. I think it's important that the players can adjust to playing on the road, because in the Big Ten half your games are on the road.

I thought it was a good game to pick up. South Dakota State had made it to the Sweet 16 the year before we started this series with them, so they're a good basketball team and they play extremely hard.

Q. How do you get the girl's attention for these games?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, as you can tell by my tone, that's what has my concern. I guess the way I'm talking to you guys about it is the way

I'm going to talk to them about it. I'm going to try to get their attention and point out to them what happened to Minnesota. Point out to them how well they played Kansas State at Kansas State.

I think we have to talk about it. I think we have to communicate with it. If we just assume, I think we're in trouble. If we just go into this game without addressing the things that have us a little bit more nervous about it. I think then we're in trouble.

But I think if we address it with our players and they Noah head of time what we expect and what they're going to be facing, they'll handle it much better.

Q. What have you seen from them so far? It looks like they've played -- (No microphone)?

COACH BLUDER: Oh, my goodness. They play 12 players ten or more minutes a game. That is a whole lot of substituting. We obviously don't go that deep, so that is another concern as well. But they play a lot of players a lot of minutes.

Q. Are they going to play the tempo that it's at?

COACH BLUDER: No, they don't really full court press a lot. They will try to push it when it's there like we do, but it's more of their offense is a lot of hard cutting, a lot of screen action. I think he just tries to keep them fresh so they can play harder in their offense.

I mean, their defense is good too, don't get me wrong. They post some different things. They front the post which is something we really haven't seen this year. They double the post sometimes which is something we really haven't seen this year. So they're going to pose some problems in situations that we haven't seen a lot of this year either.

Q. Three games in five days never easy. But right after finals week they get a week off physically, but mentally there are pros and cons coming off that, aren't there?

COACH BLUDER: There really are. I don't -- we break down for finals and kind of have shorter practices. We don't have as many practices. Tomorrow we're going to take off as a matter of fact. Monday we took off, so our players need to be focusing on finals.

What bothers me is you maybe get a little rusty over that nine days. They're used to playing a lot of games now, so you worry are they going to

get out of that game rhythm? And here South Dakota's getting a game on Thursday night. So that makes me nervous that they're going to have that game before our game.

It's what you need to do for finals, but at the same time, I wish you could just keep going in that same routine that you've established throughout the beginning of the year.

Q. Speaking of rhythm, Morgan and Jaime have been like Stockton to Malone the last couple of weeks. What is it about the balance of Morgan's court presence, and Jaime's growth and her seemingly her court vision seems to get better every day. How key is that?

COACH BLUDER: After the last game, Jaime said I'm not scoring -- I congratulated her on her nine assists and setting a personal best for assists. She said I wasn't scoring so I had to find another way to contribute. But don't you like that attitude out of a player that I'm going to do whatever it takes for our team to win?

Morgan just continues to get better. Her last three games averaging double-double, shooting the ball over 60% from the field in those three games. So it's kind of nice the two-person game that they had going against Iowa State. I think they had a lot of fun connecting like that. Hopefully, that will carry on throughout the rest of the year.

Q. How has Morgan the last two games just one foul in each game. You talked about that earlier that's kind of key. How has she avoided foul trouble in the last few games?

COACH BLUDER: I think she's gotten a little bit smarter. I think at the beginning of the year she was a little overzealous in her block-shot opportunities. We want Morgan to block shot. She's good at it. But when she has a foul, she maybe needs to taper off a little bit, depending the time of the game.

We've done a little more fronting, and that takes away her opportunity to foul, but it also takes her opportunity away to block shots. But we have done a little bit more of that this year to keep her out of foul trouble. But I think really a lot of it is her just being a smarter basketball player right now.

Q. The block total has been going up?

COACH BLUDER: Very good, very good.

Q. Could you talk a little about the balance between getting practices in and dealing with finals week? I know it's a really busy week for a lot of players?

COACH BLUDER: It is a balance. You know, I think they need to get back on the floor though. When you're in finals and you're studying all the time, it feels good to get some physical exertion and be able to get out there and exercise and kind of forget about it for a while. It's good for stress, and it's good for your body to be able to do that.

On one hand it's really good that they're out here practicing. On the other hand, we haven't put a lot of new things in because here you have nine days between games. You'd love as a coach to put a couple new wrinkles in, but we're avoiding that because we want them to focus on finals. Really with our practices do more fundamental work and shore up on their conditioning a little bit, and things that don't tax them mentally but more physically.

Q. You've got some players on the team that are high academic achievers. Could you say about what it means to have student-athletes like that on your squad?

COACH BLUDER: It's really nice going into final weeks not worrying about how we're going to do. Like having to worry are they going to study or not. I don't. I don't have to baby sit them.

They know how to study. They've done their prior work by attending classes and keeping up on their homework. It's not like they have to get a great grade on this test to pass the class can. They want a great grade to get a great grade, and there is a big difference, I think, in the two scenarios.

It's wonderful that we have great student-athletes and they do understand the value of an education. They are very concerned about finals. They want to do well because they want excellent grades. Not just because they have to stay eligible.

Q. Coming near the mid point, any updates on Trisha's status?

COACH BLUDER: She's doing a little bit of jogging right now. Jogging is a long way from playing defense and cutting and jumping, but we're seeing progress now. Where, for a long time, we were seeing no progress. So a little bit of progress is good.

We are checking into red shirt dates, medical dates, but just for educational reasons not that we've made a decision to go one way or another. We just want to know what date do we have to make this decision by if we want to use the red shirt with her.

Q. For you is it still special the UNI, the Drake games yet or is it just another game for you now?

COACH BLUDER: No, they're still special. Ten years in the Missouri Valley League and obviously UNI is my alma mater, so that's always going to be something special. Drake was my first Division I job. Jan and Jenny both graduated from Drake and coached there for eight years, I coached there for ten years, so it's still a special place.

Going into the Knapp Center, we opened up the Knapp Center. That was a special time to be there. So Jan Jensen's jersey is hanging from the rafters as a retired player, retired jersey at that school. So there are a lot of emotional parts to that basketball game.

We're still very close to a lot of those players at Drake, still exchange the Christmas cards and the emails. So it's not as emotional as it was, but it will always have a place in our heart, both of those schools will always have a place.

Q. Are you guys bussing to South Dakota?

COACH BLUDER: We are flying to South Dakota and flying back then bussing to Drake.

Q. What is that prep going to be like with just one day between those games?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, again, it's not ideal. That's why looking at the beginning of the year, this was a stretch that made me kind of nervous. I probably need to quit saying that because I don't need the team to be nervous. But I want them to be cautious. I want them to understand what they're up against too.

But, yeah, one day of prep is not ideal. We have one day of prep for Drake, and one day of prep for UNI. But the good thing is there are some similarities between the three schools. And there are some common factors between the three schools and how they play, so that's one good element.

They're all primarily player to player defensive teams. They handle screens very similarly. They're all teams that run plays that with the screen action is sometimes similar between the three schools, so that helps us.

Q. South Dakota State concern you the most just because there is not the familiarity there by the players?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, and also when South Dakota's over I'll say Drake concerns me the most. When Drake is over, I'll say UNI concerns me most, but right now you're right.

Again, you've got UNI and Drake are the in-state rivals. They know those kids playing on those teams and that makes them want to gear up for those games even more. We're one game down, two to go in reaching one of our goals as state champions.

Now the South Dakota game has none of those elements. They don't have the player familiarity, they don't have anything riding on it as far as one of our goals for the year. Also, we have a player that is in finals until 8:00 o'clock Friday night. We don't even leave campus until 9:00 Friday night to get there. So we'll get there extra late because of the finals situation and then playing on Saturday.

So, again, it's a little bit different even travel schedule than what we normally have, which, again, I like the routine. I like how we do things. I like to stick to it, but we can't.

Q. How do you handle the Saturday thing? Do you let the kids sleep in?

COACH BLUDER: We will let them sleep in for a little bit. You I don't think you can go too crazy on that, because I think they get lethargic. So we'll get them up for breakfast and a shootaround and that sort of thing, but maybe back it off an hour or so.

If we arrive on campus at 11:30 in our hotel, that may be late for us coaches, but it's not late for players.

Q. I know you talked about defense this year. Correct me if I'm wrong here, but talk about you had a couple of shooters on this team, Jaime and Hannah. They kind of grew up as shooters. Were they the toughest to get turned around on defense?

COACH BLUDER: That's interesting. Jaime definitely was. Jaime just really wasn't asked to play a lot of defense in high school. So

for her to understand and to buy into it and even her body couldn't even do it last year because she's gotten so much stronger in the course of the year. So Jaime had to be a little brain washed.

I feel like Hannah came had in with a better understanding of it, to be quite honest. I don't know that I would lump her in there with Jaime in that area.

Q. What does that brain washing consist of?

COACH BLUDER: I think film. When they see themselves getting beaten on a drive or doing something they've drilled over and over in practice, film is so telling. When you see yourself in color and the whole team is sitting there watching you in color, it really makes an impression on you. So film is the biggest thing.

And buying in, buying in that defense is important and that you can contribute even if you're having a bad shooting night, you can contribute with your defense and your rebounding. So I think they have to buy in as well.

Q. Coaches pause, rewind, pause, rewind, hit the laser pointer on?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, that's been known to happen.

Q. With this three game stretch, does it help the third game is the home game, because it can be mentally wearing if you finish on the road?

COACH BLUDER: Yes, I'm very glad that that last game is at home, and our players can leave right after that game too directly from campus, which is nice. So I think it's to our advantage to have that last game be at home.

We're playing well at home. We're undefeated at home. We've won 11 straight on our home court, so those should all give us motivation and confidence. Our home crowds have been good. So if we can get a great crowd for the white out and school is out, the University of Iowa school's out, but all the elementary and junior high and high schools are out and they're looking for things to do. So hopefully we'll have another good crowd for that in-state rivalry, and that will help us as well.

Q. If you take care of business, you'll be 12-1 going into conference. Coming into the

season, what did you think a good non-conference record would have been?

COACH BLUDER: Honestly, we were hoping for 12-1. We felt like we could get through this stretch, and now we've got three very, very important games to go. But when we looked at this at the beginning of the year, that was our goal. We still have three games left to reach that goal.

Q. Do you think North Carolina would be the one?

COACH BLUDER: We thought that would be the toughest one that we had just because it was on the road. But if we thought we came out of that stretch 2-1, that that was pretty good.

Q. Is that previous three-game stretch going to be beneficial then? Would you say that's pretty big to the remainder of the season?

COACH BLUDER: Was that three game stretch?

Q. Yeah, the previous one.

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, I thought that was huge because you're playing three games against great opponents, back to back to back. And that really sets you up to what it's going to be like playing in the Big Ten and playing that level of competition and intensity night after night after night. Then we did pretty well in that stretch. That also gives us confidence going into the Big Ten.

Q. Realtime RPI has your team fifth in the nation. Does that have any significance at all? What's that say about your non-conference schedule as a whole?

COACH BLUDER: It speaks volumes, I think. That's based not only on your wins-losses, but on who you're playing. It shows you're playing against quality competition. A lot of people can sit here now and be 9-1 in the country. I can schedule every year to go undefeated in non-conference if I wanted to. But then our RPI probably wouldn't be in the top 20 in the country with the type of teams that you need to play to guarantee that you're undefeated.

So to me it shows that not only are we winning, but we're playing against great competition. Again, that sets us up well for the Big Ten season.

Q. When you were a high schooler in Marian, did you dream of having a bobble head one day?

COACH BLUDER: That was so long ago, I don't think there was such a thing as a bobble head. In the '60s were there bobble heads '70s? I think there were. Yeah, you're right. No, I never did, Ryan.

Q. Is it important, do you think, that they're doing things like this to do whatever it takes to get fans?

COACH BLUDER: You know, I think it's really neat that our marketing department is trying some new promotions. They're trying to do things to get people into the arena and to see our product, and that's what it takes.

I feel like our team already. We have a good product. We win, we have good role models on our team. We have a reasonably priced product. But there is so much entertainment out there that we have to do other things to get people in the arena, whether it's having great halftime entertainment are or promotions or giveaways and all the effects that go on in a game.

It really has to become a full package now. It's not just a game that's going to draw people to the arena, it's all the other stuff. Good ice cream, you know. It's all the other things that come with it. I think that now we're buying into that and everybody's working hard on making the whole package good. I'm a very, very appreciative of that effort by our administration.

Q. Is it more difficult to get people here the first time than to keep them coming back?

COACH BLUDER: I think it is. Over and over again I'll hear that, or even my husband will offer some tickets to people that haven't been to a game before. They come and they can't believe it, now they want season tickets the next year because they come and they appreciate it. They didn't realize how fun it was.

Q. Do you feel like you have a top 25 team? You have the role models. Do you feel like you've done your part for fans here?

COACH BLUDER: I think we've done our part. I think we have to continue to do it. I don't think you can rest on it. And I don't think that -- I mean, it's a continual effort. It's a continual effort. So I think we've done a good job, but I think we

need to continue to focus on it too.

Q. What is the gap between you guys drawing and maybe getting into the top 10, 15?

COACH BLUDER: I haven't looked at the numbers lately. Would you say, well, Wisconsin is in that group, isn't it? About 7 or 8,000.

Q. Wisconsin, Iowa State?

COACH BLUDER: Iowa State's even higher. But to get into -- I don't know. I'm not sure. I just don't remember what the attendance figures were to be in the Top 10 last year.

Q. What do you think is separating you guys from being one of those type of programs?

COACH BLUDER: I wish I could put my finger on it, because then we could do something to change it. And I think it's getting better, so I think we have to focus on that and keep trying some new things.

But definitely doing the same thing that was done ten years ago and 15 years ago doesn't work. You have to continue to try new things and I think being innovative in your marketing. We're starting to see that with our marketing department, which is good.

Q. What about the students? What would it take to get them there?

COACH BLUDER: Students I hear around the country are not very supportive of women's basketball. But we go to some places like Purdue and they turn out. So I don't know if that's true in the Big Ten or not. Because it seems like some of our schools have some pretty good student populations and then others don't. It's kind of a school by school basis.

We have the Hawk's Nest here. We went and spoke with that group at the beginning of the year this year, and hopefully I think they're really trying with some of the Big Ten games to get some more students here, and hopefully that will help. Again, it's free for the students. It's free entertainment, which is amazing for them to be able to come and take advantage of it.

Q. San Diego State, since you're ranked in the Top 25, do you see that as added motivation for them to get a victory over you guys?

COACH BLUDER: Absolutely. I think we have a target on our back, and we will get their

best shot, there is no doubt. Because for them to take down a Top 25 team is a huge feather in their hat. You've got this game circled on your schedule, because here we have a Top 25 team on our home court, that is a great opportunity for them.

That's the same way Drake's going to look at it. That is the same way UNI's going to look at it. And we have to get used to playing and getting everybody's best shot because they're extra motivated to take down a Top 25 team. I should say Top 15 right now. Don't shortchange ourselves. Thank you.

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