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An Interview With:

COACH BLUDER

COACH BLUDER: Here we are heading into the Big Ten Tournament and I want to start by congratulating our honorees: Kachine Alexander being named first team all-Big Ten I think is a tremendous honor, being on all-defensive team, as well; Jaime Printy, second team all-Big Ten, and Kamille Wahlin, honorable mention.

So congratulations to those three and very well deserved. Jaime Printy was named Big Ten Player of the Week, our second one of the year. So it's nice to be able to wrap up the season with an Iowa player being honored in that, as well.

But we have three practices to prepare for Ohio State. Obviously I think the two hottest teams in the Big Ten meeting up in the first round of the tournament. And a lot of people thought, okay, this might be a good championship game like it was last year. We just have to play it on the first day. I think that, again, Jantel Lavender was Player of the Year in the conference. You know, she's a handful. And we are going to have to do a great job defending her.

Samantha Prahalis, I think is going to be disappointed that she was not First Team All Big Ten, she has been had the past and maybe she'll want to take that out on us, I'm not really sure.

What I think has made Ohio State good the last six games, I think they are on a six-game win streak right now, is I think their defense is better; and I think that Tayler Hill has gotten more involved in their offense. Earlier in the year she was averaging four points a game and now she's averaging 13 points a game. She has really improved her game and they have really become more balanced. It used to be a two-person game and you had to stop Prahalis and Lavender. And now it's not like that at all; four people in double

figures, two 6-5 players to contend with, and those 6-5 gals had their way with us the last time we played us. So we are going to have to do a much better job on our inside game.

Q. 25 in the first game and 12 the second, they were really -- is she setting screens or do you do screens for her to get her open just try to put in a new system?

COACH BLUDER: A little bit of both. I think we need to do both of those things. I think we need to do some screen action to get her open, but also she's got to mentally not let them take her out of her game, either. They just really face-guarded her last time and played some box-and-one on her; when they came out of the box and one, we beat that; and when they came out of that, they just really put Sammy Prahalis is on her and really didn't let her leave her side the entire game.

Q. Is there a common denominator with your two in the second half; the last eight games, you outscored most opponents pretty sizably the last several times?

COACH BLUDER: I think for our conditioning, J.C. Moreau, our strength and conditioning coach, has done a good job like he always does. But I think any you're out-performing your opponent that consistently in the second half, it shows that mentally you're in it for 40 minutes and you're able to get it done. And I think our conditioning has been really good this year.

Q. At the beginning of the season, Ohio State has been -- now does it seem like both teams are rolling like everybody expected from day one.

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, again I think these are the two hottest teams in the Big Ten. We both have long win streaks going into it, both of us; both of us playing well; both of us feel good

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about our teams right now.

So, you know, basketball is a long season, 30 games. It's hard to keep that momentum up and intensity up for all 30 games. And you saw both teams have little lapses, and now here we come out, tied for third and I think both of us are pretty happy with where we are ending the year.

Q. Do you feel, Ohio State scored a lot in both games, do you have to throw them down -- who will take the third game --

COACH BLUDER: Well, it would be nice. I don't think you can really contain them that much. They are averaging 74 points a game, and not just against us but against all of the Big Ten opponents. They are a good-scoring team.

So I think that a high-scoring game for both of us would bode well for us. You know, I don't think we are going to say we are going to hold them. I don't think our game plan can be going in there holding them to 50 points. I don't think that's going to happen.

Q. You say Ohio State as improved on defense; have you guys improved at all?

COACH BLUDER: I think we have. I think we have improved much over last year defensively. But this will be a big test going against Ohio State.

Q. You doubled Jantel a lot in the first and second game and seemed to throw her off and she turned the over a lot. Do you switch it up and keep her guessing?

COACH BLUDER: Absolutely I think we have to. With her you have to be unpredictable because she's just so good. When she gets the ball in the block, she's a 55 percent shooter and she's so effective. The thing about Jantel, she can shoot from outside, too. It's not just the block where she's dangerous. And her and Ashley Adams have just formed a very nice high/low game. Ashley Adams can really pass the ball well. Her range is not as good as Jantel's yet but she's a really nice addition to their lineup.

Q. What is the mood of the team right now?

COACH BLUDER: The mood of the team is very good. Coming home from Indiana, I think the team feels very good about where we are read now. We scored extremely well the last three games. So I think our offense is really clicking and I think that just gives us even more confidence.

Q. You touched on it a little bit earlier, but what do the individual accolades mean?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, I think to be recognized in this conference is really special because it is the top women's basketball conference. I think when you are recognized as an All Big Ten player that means something. And we only pick five for the first team and only five for the second team and only five for the third team. There are some conferences that pick ten or 12 for their first team, and so that waters it down. But we don't do that.

I went through my ballot the first time I tried to select the Top 15 players and not worry about first, second or third team. Just to select the Top 15 players was really difficult to do. That's how many good players there are in this league.

Q. Who else in the tournament do you think is going to be really very tough?

COACH BLUDER: Anybody that we play. (Laughter).

Obviously Michigan State won it all. But Ohio State has the highest RPI of anybody in our Big Ten right now at No. 9 in the country. Michigan State is at 15, we are at 19. So you have the 3 highest RPIs in the conference on one side of the bracket. So our side of the bracket is tough. There's no doubt about it. Michigan State, you know, we had a semifinal game with them last year and we would love to have a rematch of that this year.

Q. Do you worry about the NCAA stuff at this point or do you just wait until after the tournament to focus on it?

COACH BLUDER: Well, I feel like we go into this Big Ten tournament a little more relaxed in the fact that I feel like we are in.

So I think that we don't have to go in here with something to prove. Now, there's other schools in the Big Ten that I think are really going in there with something to prove and I think adding that extra pressure, that can be difficult on you.

So I think we are going in there to improve our seed and to win a Big Ten tournament title and to beat Ohio State in the first game. So I think our focus is different than other people's focus and I think that's good for us.

Q. What do you remember about that first year when you made the nice run and you

finished second in the Big Ten and then won the whole thing, great game against Purdue?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, in the final. What do I remember about it? I mean, it was such a great game. Cara, MVP of the tournament, her birthday, it's like everything was perfect. It was just a really fun environment to win that Big Ten tournament. I would love to have that team experience that.

Q. Did she play 116 or 120 minutes of the tournament?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, I remember that. That game, we really played five players and six, seven players and that was about it.

Q. The second half of the second game at Ohio State, obviously the game is -- did you break down or was it that --

COACH BLUDER: It was both. I think we didn't play as good defensively as we are capable of in the second half. You look at these two games we played Ohio State, we beat them three halves. They beat us one-half. We have to remember that.

But they definitely got us in the second half and it was a defensive break down more than anything else. They shot the ball extremely well. They got again the high/low going. It was their post players that were so very effective against us. Those two post players really, I mean, took most of the scoring opportunities.

Q. Kash, Trisha and Kelly all had threes --

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, I think any time you hit that it just feels so good. It's just a momentum -- it just increases momentum when you hit threes. Everybody gets excited about it. For some reason, that three-point play gets everybody in the whole place excited.

Q. The NCAA Tournament seeding, how important would it be to get a couple of wins in the Big Ten tournament so you could secure a higher seed?

COACH BLUDER: You know, I think every game we have an opportunity to increase our seed. And so it's important that we go in there and try to win every game like we always do.

But again, I feel like we don't have the pressure of going in there and having to win to get to the NCAA Tournament. I think that's good for us. But certainly the better seed you get in the

NCAA Tournament increases your opportunity to advance.

Q. Any update on Hannah?.

COACH BLUDER: I don't know yet. She was out all last week because of her back. So I don't know. We are going to try to start bringing her into some practices today; so that's a big question mark.

Q. I think there's going to be ten teams with home sites and two really close by; would you like to get one of the four neutral?

COACH BLUDER: Oh, no doubt. I think that's the best situation. I think having a good seed and playing a neutral court; it doesn't get it any better than that. So that would be the epitome of an opportunity.

Q. Theairra is shooting around a little bit -- what's her status right now, is she going to practice?

COACH BLUDER: No, not ready for practice or contact or anything like that yet. But she's shooting a lot. Not really shooting jumpshots. More set shots more than anything else.

She looks great. Her surgery was very successful. Yeah, I mean, I wish she could play for us right now, because she just looks so good. But she has to the been cleared for any contact yet.

Q. Speaking of tournaments, any thoughts on Randi Peterson and Wendy Ausdemore?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah I'm real proud of those two players -- coaches I guess now. I'm just really proud of Randi and Wendy and what they have done. You know, the first appearance in an NCAA Tournament, and for those two to lead the way, I couldn't be happier for them and I wish them well. I wish we could be here this weekend so we could go down and support them.

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