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An interview with:

COACH LISA BLUDER

COACH BLUDER: I was trying to look back at last year's team, and looking back at our team last year, we probably beat some people that we probably shouldn't have beaten if you just looked at our team on paper, and I really credit that to that thing that every team tries to grasp, and that's that elusive team chemistry.

I think our team, everybody on our team, really understands right from wrong. They understand that our team is based on values. They buy into that. They understand about sacrifice, they understand that nobody's more important than anybody else on this basketball team, and I think that's why we win, and I think that's why we have fun doing it.

Last year we were able to sneak up on a couple of people with everybody assuming that we lost most of our lineup to graduation. This year I don't think we'll be sneaking up on anybody. I think we'll have a target on our back this year, and we've tried to prepare our team for that.

Although, we're still relatively young. We only have two seniors on this basketball team. We return our entire starting lineup, a group that played for the Big Ten championship last year, and a team that advanced to the second round of the NCAA Tournament.

Every great team needs a great point guard to lead its way. I think we have one in Kamille Wahlin. She was third-team all-Big Ten last year. She's so consistent. The player never takes a possession off. She never takes a break ever in practice. She's such a great competitor and a wonderful, wonderful floor leader for us.

We return our off guard in Jaime Printy. Big Ten Freshman of the Year, second team

Freshman All-American. And the good thing about Jaime is that she discovered a defensive stance over the summer. She has rounded out her game both offensively and defensively now. I'm really proud of her, because she really took it to heart, and she did a great job working hard on her defense all year.

Of course, we return Kachine Alexander, first team all-Big Ten. She's already made a couple of preseason polls. She's on the John Wooden Preseason List. She's on the Wade Watch List, the top 25 players in America. All Defensive Team last year. She was the Big Ten's leading rebounder. Just had a great junior year.

Obviously, she's had surgery in the off-season that slowed her down a little bit in the summertime, and we're still trying to get her back on track and getting her ready to play in a competitive season.

But Kachine, in my mind, has just that right amount of confidence and cockiness and competitiveness that blows any athlete through the roof. And she has it. And she walks in the gym and knows she has it.

Kelly Krei returns as power forward. I thought Kelly came on nicely at the end of last year. Kelly's just a hard matchup for people at that power forward because of her quickness and speed.

Morgan Johnson returns for us at center. Morgan was the leading field goal shooter in the Big Ten as a freshman last year, which is an amazing statistic. Coming back now she's gotten stronger over the summer. She took that to heart. She's put on a little bit of weight, which I know most women don't want to do that, but it's a good thing in this situation. She knows what to expect this year. She's ready for the challenge, and I think she's playing very, very well.

We have Hannah Draxten and Theairra back as well, after sitting out last year due to injuries. So it's nice to have that extra depth with

those players.

We have Trisha Nesbitt returning as our back-up point guard, and we have Megan Considine returning as a walk on in that situation again.

We have two newcomers. Jade Rogers is our only freshman, from Cedar Rapids Kennedy. We expect her to play the three or four position this year. But coming out of high school, again, that learning curve is pretty steep right off the bat.

We have another newcomer, Kalli Hansen from Kirkwood Community College. She won national championships both freshman and sophomore years. She was a junior college All-American, and I think she's really going to be somebody that people are impressed with. Kalli will see immediate playing time. She's a good player. She's strong, she's fast, she's versatile, and she's somebody that we're very excited about that can add a new dimension to our basketball team this year.

Our schedule, again, is going to be challenging. We're playing both Virginia Tech and North Carolina from the ACC. Both of those games will be on the road.

We host, from the Big 12, Iowa State. We host Kansas State. We're also playing -- we also host Northern Iowa, another team that went to the NCAA Tournament, and playing at Drake to round out our in-state rivalries.

But another team we also play on the road, South Dakota State, a very difficult place to play. A lot of people have gone in there and had some really tough games. So that's going to be another really challenging game for us.

But, of course, the Big Ten season is upon us. So most key players return from the Big Ten. This year we are going to 16 games versus 18 games. That is one change in the Big Ten Conference.

But our team is very excited to get going, and we started practice, officially, last Monday. That is another NCAA rule change this year. We can start two weeks ahead of time than we have in past years. We get 30 practices, 40 days out from our first competition. So today was already practice number six.

Q. Same question as last year: Who backs up Morgan Johnson and who gets a rest?

COACH BLUDER: Right now we have Kelsey Cermak backing up. And Kelsey Cermak, I forgot to mention earlier, she's going to be backing

up Morgan, and she's a captain on our team. She's a senior on our team. Captain along with Kamille Wahlin. They've both been voted captains. But Kelsey Cermak has always been willing to do whatever we want her to do. Whatever will help this team in whatever capacity. Once again, she's going out of her position in order to help us.

So, yes, are we going to have to give her some help on defense when she's playing against taller people? Absolutely. We know that. But we feel like we kind of were in that position last year with the freshman post. That we had to provide a little extra help defending the post.

In our offense, we feel like we don't need a true post to run our offense if we don't want to. If we want one, we definitely can use one. So we'll probably have a different look offensively when Morgan's in there, a true post, and when Morgan's not in there.

Q. Last year did you feel like when Morgan had to sit out, did you feel like was it much of a disadvantage? Or did you feel like your team kind of plugged it pretty well?

COACH BLUDER: I think we plugged it pretty well. Especially when you're considering we were backing up with another freshman last year. And I think that we did fine. Would I rather have Morgan in there? Absolutely. But I know Morgan's going to need breaks, there are going to be foul situations. So we have to have a back-up plan.

Q. Offensively you're going to have a lot of weapons. Even the loss of Stanford put 67 points on them, and only two teams scored more than Stanford all last season. Talk about the experience of those two tournament games last year and how they've helped you this year?

COACH BLUDER: The tournament games were really good for us. Obviously it was a goal for us to make the tournament. When we did, and we see Rutgers as the opponent, so many thoughts go through your mind. Obviously Vivian Stringer's coached team. We're friends. It's an unusual situation with that. But we also know that's an extremely athletic team. A team that had three WNBA picks from that team last year.

That's probably one of those teams that, when you look on paper, we had no business beating. But we were able to beat it through a very balanced offensive system and a group that just kept working extremely hard. Some of those



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things that I talked about at the beginning of the press conference.

So that did us a lot of good knowing that we beat one of the most athletic teams in America. And going against Stanford, that is a tough situation. You're playing the No. 2 seed in the entire country on their home floor, and they're shooting completely lights out. They shot over 75 percent.

But you're right about we still scored against them. I think Kachine outscored the University of Connecticut in the first half when they played each other, which is pretty impressive that Kachine was able to do that.

It was good experience for us. It was also good experience for us to get to the Big Ten championship game and play Ohio State in that championship game. That has a little bit of a bitter outcome for us. So I know that our team has looked for that all year long as a challenge point, playing Ohio State again.

Q. How has Theairra come back from her surgery?

COACH BLUDER: Theairra has come back pretty well. I haven't been able to judge her yet because in the preseason we can't watch them play. This past week she had a little bit of trouble with it, and today she was sick. I told her we have to get that black cloud over your head away.

She's got great spirits. They feel good. Today she said "my knees feel really good," but now this other thing, kept her out of practice today. So I haven't had much opportunity to see her in drill situations or in scrimmage situations on the floor.

But I know that Theairra's going to be a benefit for our team. I know she's an asset. She's incredibly athletic. She's a hard worker. She has great speed, can rebound, can play defense. We think Theairra's going to be a big asset for us this year.

Q. How about Hannah, how far has she come?

COACH BLUDER: She is feeling very good. She's very well. She's been in all of our practice situations. She's going to add so much depth to our game, which we didn't have last year, having both Hannah and Theairra back.

Q. How does that change the dynamic when you have two -- Theairra was the starter last year before she got hurt, Hannah was

pencilled in to start. Now you have seven pencilled starters?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, brings a lot of competition to practice, because nobody really knows who is going to start. Everybody looks at that group we had returning, and that's not set. I just think it brings great competition to practice.

It's going to make us coaches really have to think more on the bench. It's not like we look at one person. You rotate in now. We'll have to make some good decisions and work with that. Everybody's going to have to understand their role on this team, and it might change as the year goes on.

Q. The Big Ten goes back to 16 games, gets rid of that early-squirrely game in the December. You've got three of five on the road, four of the last six at home. Just your thoughts on the Big Ten schedule this year for Iowa?

COACH BLUDER: We go back to the 16 games, which, to me, the most important thing is we're not beating up on each other. All during the course of 18 games during the year, but it also gets rid of that early game when you're still getting your team ready and playing a Big Ten game in the beginning of December. I didn't like that.

Who we lose if we're only playing single games against -- we're playing single games against Northwestern, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Purdue, so I'm not sure if that's good for us or bad for us. I haven't really analyzed it that much. We're just going to go out and play them.

I think it was a good move to go back to 16 games, though.

Q. How do you like the extra practices? Is that something that you can work on a lot of different things early?

COACH BLUDER: I like the addition of being able to start early. What that enables us to do is go five days a week and have two days of practice off. Before you went six with one day off. I think it eases the players into the practice a little bit more. I don't feel we have to go our full three hours or more on the floor to get everything in. I feel like we can bring it in more gently or slowly than we did in the past. So just hammered it into them right away.

So I think it's a good change. I like it. I think the players like it too.

Q. The offense now, last year the three-point shooting was so great. That was obviously a strength. With Hansen, could it be even better than last year?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, I don't see why it has to be any worse. We're trying to get better all the time. So I don't know why it cannot be better. Plus, we have the advantage this year of our team understands our offense earlier. So some shots that probably -- I think our three-point percentage could have been better earlier in the season last year. So I think that's going to help as well.

But Kalli Hansen is a very good three-point shooter. And Hannah Draxten is as well. So we're adding some more three-point weapons to this group. So our goal is, yeah, we want three-point shots. But we want to get to the rim. We want to be a free-throw shooting team as well. We were the fifth best free-throw shooting team last year, and we want to get there as well.

Q. You knew Jaime was going to be good coming in. But do you think because she was thrust into the lineup with injuries that she took it and ran and stepped up even more than maybe expectations?

COACH BLUDER: Sometimes I think freshmen just sit back. They kind of think: This is my freshman year. I'm really not expected to do anything. I'm just supposed to learn and be part of the ride and I'll take off after that. We had to convince our freshmen last year that it was okay for them to be successful, that it was okay for them to win.

We really had to challenge them mentally and just allow them to do that. Allow yourselves to be good. It's okay as a freshman. You might as well go ahead and be good. So I think that's a mindset that we turned into our Big Ten season. Once they got it, they had a lot of fun.

Q. What did Jaime do to get better at defense? Foot work? Just work harder?

COACH BLUDER: Conscientious effort of staying in her stance, understanding defensive concepts, and getting stronger in the weight room. She worked very hard at developing strengths so that she can stay down in a stance, so she can be in better balance and so that she can help in recover. She's just a lot more stronger than she was last year, and I think that's the biggest part.

Q. Depth will always be a key, and this year your bench is going to be one of the most experienced in the conference. You have four letterwinners on your bench. Ohio State has five freshmen on their bench; Michigan State, five freshmen on their bench; Purdue, six freshmen and a sophomore. So it looks like for Iowa this year bench experience factor could help you out?

COACH BLUDER: Yeah, I think it is. I think we have a lot of experience. What is amazing is we still only have two seniors. So you look at the future, and that looks very bright as well.

Q. Jaime and Jade had a couple of nice battles back in high school. With all the experience that Jaime got right away, has she stepped up and helped mentor Jade even though she's just a sophomore? And what have you seen from Jaime?

COACH BLUDER: I agree with you, Jaime, just because they're friends, has helped Jade quite a bit. But our whole team is like that. Our whole team, they understand that they have to help each other out. They enjoy mentoring to each other and bringing new players along.

So, yeah, Jaime's done it, but I'm really proud of our whole team for the way they embrace our newcomers and welcome them into our system and our family. They've all done a good job of that.

Jade has that steep learning curve as far as being a freshman, but she is so positive. She loves being an Iowa Hawkeye. She's dreamed about wearing that jersey. That is something that's hard to recruit. That automatic love. Usually you've got to be here for a while and go through some battles before you absolutely love the Iowa Hawkeyes and know what it's like to compete for them. And Jade comes in. She's been on the sidelines and seen us play so many times, she knows what to expect and she has the benefit of that.

Q. But touching upon what you mentioned a minute ago, is it really cool as a coach, then, to have a team that is still young but has already experienced success?

COACH BLUDER: Absolutely. It really is. I think again, that's why we win and we have fun doing it. Our team is just enjoyable to be around. Last year they had that youthful enthusiasm,

everything was new. I still feel that way with this team. They have a lot to learn. Their personalities are really good for each other. They make our jobs as coaches a lot of fun.

Q. Trisha Nesbitt really came on strong last year. She's starting to get some leadership qualities as a guard and coming in for Kamille?

COACH BLUDER: I agree. I thought Trisha Nesbitt, really, when you look at the Indiana game at their place and she's thrown into the starting lineup because Kamille is out with a concussion, and she holds her own in there and plays an incredible amount of minutes. Trisha Nesbitt rose to the occasion for us last year a number of times. So I'm expecting good things out of her this year.

I think from what I understand she had a very good summer league. We're not able to go out there and watch those games, but I get the stats and everybody tells me that she did a nice job out there.

Q. Morgan was thrust into that role last year a little bit. How did she grow last year and how is she -- besides strength, how is she better over the summer?

COACH BLUDER: I think being in that role and now knowing what to expect. She's got a different confidence level. She kind of knows this is my position, and, you know, it's mine right now. Somebody can maybe beat me out, but it's mine right now. I think that gives her more confidence too.

But the strength. She's -- you can ask her if she wants to tell you how much weight she put on. I don't know if she wants me to tell you that or not. But it's good weight. It enables her to stand there without being pushed off the block.

Again, I think she understands that, yes, I am going to be a part of this offense, and I am going to be counted on. Just that different mindset helps her so much. So I think she'll be helpful for us defensively. I think she'll be able to stay in the block a little bit better too. Today in practice she had a beautiful transition offense, so she hasn't lost any speed with the addition of putting on some weight.

Q. Ohio State is going to be the team to beat again. But anybody else? I mean, your team should be up there, too. So anybody else you think is going to be tough?

COACH BLUDER: I truly haven't analyzed the rest of the Big Ten and who they have coming back. Barb's probably done a better job doing that than I have. But I think your usual suspects of Purdue and Michigan State are going to be there. I think Northwestern is going to be much improved from where they were. Last year they didn't lose a lot. They have Amy Jaeschke back inside. Wisconsin didn't lose a lot. They lost their point guard, and really that was it.

So I just think it's going to be an incredible battle this year within the Big Ten. But I think everybody has that game between us and Ohio State kind of circled. That game is going to be on CBS, nationally televised game.

I think everybody in the nation knows that game's going to be special.

Q. The recruiting has seemed to step up. Is that a combination of back-to-back-to-back winning season together and having one of the nicest practice facilities being ready next fall?

COACH BLUDER: There is no doubt the addition of what we're doing with our practice facilities helps us with recruiting. I think we've had three 20-plus-win seasons in a row. I think that it gets recruits excited about our team. I think that when people watch us play, they see a team that's out there working hard, unselfish, having fun. I think that attracts people that they want to play in that style and with those type of players. And I think we're recruiting good people that have a good reputation. People want to play with those good people.

When they get here, definitely being able to counter everybody else in the Big Ten with what we're building in our practice facilities is going to help.

Q. Hansen is a late addition to that recruiting class. How did she come to the fold? What did you see in her and has she exceeded your expectations of what she could do?

COACH BLUDER: We kept watching her all during the year last year at Kirkwood and were just impressed. You know, Ken Moule does an unbelievable job there. He wins so many national championships. His kids know what it's like to work. They know what it's like to win. So that's nice that we have that so close.

She's our first Kirkwood player we've gotten. I think she's going to exceed everybody's expectations for what she can do this year.

Q. Because have you had a JUCO player?

COACH BLUDER: We had one when I first got here, Natalie Chambers from Illinois Central Community College, and I believe that's it here at Iowa. Junior colleges is a way -- we haven't recruited strongly to begin with, but we've certainly looked at them in the April signing period and tried to fill in voids. We're very fortunate that we were able to get her late.

Q. If you stay healthy, what is the ceiling on this team? How good can this team become February and March?

COACH BLUDER: I think this team can go deeper in the NCAA Tournament. That's what we really want to accomplish. I know that we have sights set on Big Ten championships. That's what we'd like to also accomplish. And we know we were close last year within one basket. So we also understand Ohio State has everybody back, and there are a lot of key people returning in the conference, in the Big Ten Conference. But it's something that we have our sights set on.

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