

Wednesday, October 26, 2016

## Lisa Bluder

### Women's Basketball

LISA BLUDER: Coming into here I was kind of thinking about our team this year, and when I think about our team, you would think with four starters returning, that we would have a really veteran team. But the strange thing is is when you look at our team, we're still pretty darn young. We have a lot of youth on this team. But the good thing is, and the difference from this year, is that that youth has some really good playing experience, and I think that's going to reap us benefits this year.

We do have a pretty good senior, in Ally Disterhoft. She was our team's leading scorer last year. She's had three terrific seasons wearing an Iowa uniform. This week, as you know, she was named to the preseason All Big Ten team, which shows you the respect that she has from throughout the entire league. But Ally's career statistics are amazing when you think of what she's done as a Hawkeye over her career. You know, not only was she our back-to-back leading scorer the last two years, she shot 54-percent from the field last year, and I'm just so proud of Ally and how she represents our basketball team. I think back to that poster when she was eight or nine years old, and we were trying to find a little girl in our community that was athletic looking that could pose in our poster. Our poster we wanted was "Dream Big," and we wanted this little girl tucking that basketball underneath her arm and looking out into Carver-Hawkeye Arena and dreaming about being a Hawkeye. And wow, that vision came true. She has not quit dreaming big her entire career. She continues to do so, and I'm just extremely proud of her. I don't think it got enough play last year when Ally was named as the captain of the Academic All-American Team. I mean there's only 15 women on that team in the whole country. The year before she was the only sophomore named to that team. And then last year the first-ever junior named the captain. That's an amazing accomplishment, and this is a success story, to say the least.

Other players, junior Chase Coley returns. She was our most improved player last year. She averaged double digits, shot over 50 percent from the field, and the thing that I'm really excited about is Chase is starting to develop a voice. She's becoming a leader every day. And as you know, she's a versatile player that can play multiple positions for us. Our center, Megan Gustafson returns. Megan was on the all-freshman team for the Big Ten last year. A freshman led our team in rebounding. A freshman led our team in scoring percentage last year with Megan. The thing is she's stronger, she's ready to make a big jump.

And then her teammate, Tania Davis, our point guard, also joined Megan on the All-Big Ten Freshman Team last year. Tania has made a significant jump. She's taking ownership of this team now, and it's fun to see that develop. She knows she's our point guard. She knows she's the leader on our court, and she's owning that, and I love the attitude that she has out on the court right now.

During media day everybody kind of wants to know about the freshmen, and I think we have a pretty good group to talk about. We're welcoming five freshmen this year. It was ranked as the seventh best recruiting class in America, and that means back-to-back Top 20 recruiting classes for our program, and obviously I think that bodes well for the future.

We welcome Iowa's Miss Basketball, Makenzie Meyer. She led her Mason City High School team to its first state championship last year. She scored over 1,500 points in high school. She was a McDonald's All-America nominee, a top 100 player nationally. And the thing about Mack is she can play either position for us. She's a steady, steady player on the court. She just doesn't get rattled, and I love her composure that she brings to the court.

Amanda Ollinger, another Iowan, from Linn-Mar High School where former Hawkeye great Jaime Printy was her high school coach. So kind of an interesting connection there. Amanda was also a McDonald's All-America nominee, a top 100 recruit nationally. Amanda can play either forward position for us, and with her height and with her three-point shooting range, she can create some incredible mismatches, once she figures out how to use that.

Illinois Miss Basketball, Kathleen Doyle, joins our program. She took her Benet Academy High School team to back-to-back state championships. She was a two-time first-team all-state selection, McDonald's All-America nominee, top 100 recruit nationally. Kathleen played point guard in high school, but she's adapting well to either position and will play either for us on the floor this year.

Lexi Sevillian from Goodrich Flint High School, kind of unique angle in that she joins her former high school and AU teammate Tania Davis. So they're joining forces again, and they're excited about having the opportunity to wear the same uniform again. But Lexi was, again, a McDonald's All-America nominee, two-time all-state selection in Michigan. She was runner-up for Miss Michigan Basketball last year. And she's another guard that has really good three-point range, but she also has the defensive mentality to really back that up.

And lastly, Bre Cera, another McDonald's All-America nominee, led her high school team, Mukwonago to a runner-up finish in Wisconsin last year. She leaves that program as the leading scorer all-time. Bre has an amazing motor. I love how hard she works every single possession. She can play defense. She can rebound on both ends of the floor. And I just love the energy that she brings to the court.

But even with all this youth, I really feel that we are the deepest that we've been in a long time. I think we're the most balanced that we've been in a long, long time. And you look at places that we can look for contribution, I think there's a number of sources. Alexa Kastanek, Hannah Stewart, Christina Buttenham, I think all of them have the opportunity to contribute for us this year.

And then you look at our schedule, looking down the line, it's probably not a schedule that reflects a schedule for a young team, although we do have the benefit of playing 17 home games in Carver-Hawkeye Arena. We'll be playing Notre Dame in Carver in the Big TenCC Challenge.

We'll be hosting Iowa State. We'll be hosting UNI. We'll be traveling to play at Drake and in the Cancun tournament we'll be playing UCLA and James Madison, so that'll be a really competitive tournament for us as well. It's going to be an entertaining year, for sure, and I know that this team is anxious to get underway, and I know that you are excited to meet them, but I imagine you might have a few questions before we head to the court.

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**Q. Talk about the versatility. Is that the goal as a coach to have a bunch of different parts that you can go tall, you can go small, you can go quick, you can go defense and shoot 3s and you tend to develop that throughout the year.**

LISA BLUDER: I think versatility is something you always want to look for when you're recruiting players. You want to make sure all your positional needs are covered. You like the ability to go fast or to go big or have the ability to shoot 3s and go inside. I think we've accomplished that with this team. I think we're a very versatile team.

**Q. There's potential for five Top 10, five potential Top 10 wins, and those types of games mean everything in the world.**

LISA BLUDER: We have an incredibly difficult schedule. But it also gives you opportunities; right? And when you're young you're kind of naive, enthusiastic. You don't know what you're not supposed to do. And so I think that those are opportunities for us, and we have a few of those on our home court. We have went down to 16 Big Ten games for women's basketball this year. We were at 18 last year; we're at 16 this year, so our doubles this year include having Maryland twice, the No. 1 team in the Big Ten, so call it bad luck or call it an opportunity. I guess call it what you may.

**Q. You always talk about how big your chemistry was, your leadership. Didn't really hear much about that last year. Did that drop last? How do you get that back this year?**

LISA BLUDER: The Sweet 16 season, going back to that year, we had incredible leadership on that team, and those players had been playing a lot since their freshman year. So they had just grown as leaders and they were ready to take on that role. And then I just really think it was my fault that I didn't prepare somebody to wear those shoes. I think it was my fault in not developing leaders at a young age, kind of assuming it was going pretty well. And this year we've taken a change in that, in that we have five members on our women's basketball leadership committee, and they include some young players, two sophomores, two juniors and a senior, because we want to change that and we want to develop leaders at a younger age, and we think that'll help them in the future.

**Q. The point guard taking ownership of your team into her second year. How is she specifically doing?**

LISA BLUDER: Being much more aggressive on the floor. You know, sometimes you can just

tell when a kid owns it. They kind of throw their shoulders back. They walk a little differently. She's having fun. She's smiling on the floor. But Tania is a pretty serious person overall, but I think she understands that her voice is really speaking volumes as our point guard this year. And I think last year she deferred a lot to the upper classmen, and a lot of freshmen do that. I will say this freshman class is not doing that, and I kind of like it.

**Q. Megan would show signs last year. She was doing things that really had potential, but not on a consistent basis. Do you expect to see those things more consistently this year?**

LISA BLUDER: I do. Megan is stronger this year. And she really never lifted weights until she got on our campus, and then to go into a freshman Big Ten season and battle against some of the strongest women in our conference, that's a pretty tall task. Now she knows what she's up against and she's had a year to prepare in our strength room, and our strength coach Lindsay Dinkelman has done a great job with her. And again, I think she just knows what she's capable of doing now. Those freshmen are different, because they're confident; they're experienced as only sophomores and they're pretty excited about the season.

**Q. Tania's health?**

LISA BLUDER: Tania's health is terrific. The end of last year she was playing with an injured shoulder for the last month of the season. She had surgery as soon as the season was over. She did sit out this summer to make sure she was 100 percent healthy once the season began, but she is 100 percent healthy.

**Q. Her (Tania Davis) aggressiveness, what other areas have you seen her improve in the off season?**

LISA BLUDER: Well, mostly I think I've seen Tania grow as far as a leader, and we're continuing to work on her voice, but she is on our leadership council, and I think she's going to reap a lot of benefits from that. But her shooting confidence has grown also. You see Tania, she was kind of maybe our fourth option on the floor last year, and now -- I think she's one of our top three-point shooters this year, and so I think that's one of the big differences is her three-point shooting.

You know, the freshmen last year, Tania kind of had some tendency to take some plays off, kind of relax a little bit. She's not taking plays off anymore, and ultimately that's going to make you a player better.

**Q. What about Carly?**

LISA BLUDER: Carly has had some setbacks with her knees this past summer. As you know, she received a medical redshirt for her last year because she injured her knee at the beginning of the season. She was just doing some great things at that point when we lost her. But this summer we had to redo a couple of things in her knee, twice we had to go in there. But now we are hoping and anticipating that she'll be back on the floor by December 1. So that's the good news is we thought for a while that we weren't going to have her at all this year, and now we're looking at a December 1 back on the floor.

**Q. What's significance of missing the NCAA Tournament for the first time in eight or nine years last year. How much does that motivate this team? How much does it motivate you?**

LISA BLUDER: It's motivated me, and just keep reminding me of that; right? It's something that I don't like to talk about. It's something that we are really proud of the streak that we had going. We didn't like to see it come to an end, but it did, and now the best thing we can do is learn from that experience and use it as great motivation to return to the NCAA tournament.

**Q. Do you feel confident in the sense Tania got a lot of minutes in light of Whitney Jennings leaving the program?**

LISA BLUDER: Without a doubt. Tania's experience that she gained last year is invaluable for our season this year. It's definitely helped with that loss.

**Q. Freshmen aren't just sitting back. And even with all the experience you have coming back, could one of them be a leader, could a true freshmen be a leader on a team like this?**

LISA BLUDER: You know, I'm not sure if I'm going to call them a leader. I'm going to call them a strong contributor at this point. I think as a freshman it's hard to lead a team because you really don't know what you're about to go through yourself, and it's hard to know what you expect or what -- just that lack of knowledge. I expect that they will be leaders in the future of our basketball team. But I think you'll see some contributors, there's no doubt.

These women, they're not -- I've seen it happen so many times where freshmen come in and they just think, I'm just a freshman, I'll wait and see what happens, I'll defer to the upper classmen. No, they're not willing to do that, and I really, really like that attitude.

**Q. Is it likely that any of them will have a chance to start?**

LISA BLUDER: There could be. There could be a freshman in our starting lineup.

**Q. Since joining the Big Ten, Maryland has won two titles. They're going to go for a third, favorite again this year. What are your thoughts or feelings on how you see the Big Ten conference race shaking out?**

LISA BLUDER: Maryland is a great program. They have won national championships and been in several Final Fours. Brenda does a terrific job with that program. Picked to win it again this year, No. 1 recruiting class in America last year, so they just continue to reload. But I mean Ohio State is going to be probably a Top 5 team as well in our conference. You know, the predictors yesterday came out -- or Monday came out saying Michigan State and Indiana were kind of the next couple in line. Indiana didn't lose anybody last year, so they returned everybody. Michigan State did lose Aerial Powers, she went early to the draft. Kelsey Mitchell, our Player of the Year, only a junior, let's hope she gets the Aerial Powers desire and wants to go early in the draft. That would be kind of nice.

**Q. Makenzie Meyer and Doyle, seems like they would be on the cusp of being able to really contribute. Can you sort of talk about what they bring?**

LISA BLUDER: Makenzie is, first of all, she's a freshman that just doesn't make a lot of mistakes. She learns. She retains knowledge and information and takes it back to practice the next day, and that sounds like something that sounds like it's really easy, but sometimes freshmen, you learn it one day and you forget it the next day. Not the case with Makenzie. Terrific learner. Great three-point shooter, been shooting the ball very well, and the thing that I like about her she's a steady player. She just doesn't make a lot of mistakes. And you watch

practice film afterwards and you just look at the list of who needs to work on what and Makenzie's never got a lot of things after her name.

Kathleen Doyle, you know, she's a winner. The girl won back-to-back state championships in Illinois, and she's got a great joy about her. She's got a great spunk that kind of brings life to everybody. But she's a competitor, and she wants to win and she's going to do a great job for us as well. She's willing to lead the team as a point guard, but she's also willing to be an off guard and play in both of those positions.

**Q. Is it rebounding? Is that what'll help you most from her or something else?**

LISA BLUDER: You know, I love her size and her athleticism. You know, at six foot one, you know, she can shoot the three with ease, but she can also get in there on the boards and she can post up anybody. It's just kind of learning how to use those strengths to create mismatches on the floor, and that's something that she's gotta learn, instead of just kind of playing, but she's gotta analyze the game and kind of figure out, okay, I can post this person up and take advantage of that, or somebody that's a little bit bigger on me and slower I can take them to the rim. She has to continue to figure out how to use her strengths, and once she does she's going to be a great contributor for us.

**Q. How do you think the freshman class will be physically?**

LISA BLUDER: Well, I think this freshman class, we don't have a center coming in here, so it's not like we needed to have the brawn that you want when you're playing inside, like Megan had to last year as a freshman. That was a real disadvantage when she's going against experienced people and maybe lacking a little bit of the strength that she needed to compete. The players that we have right now, the freshmen we have right now, they're playing in positions where that's not as much of a needed asset, and so I think they'll be just fine as freshmen contributing to our team.

**Q. How important is it to have Megan and Chase being able to go up against each other every day so they both can get somebody their size and maybe improve a little?**

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, Megan and Chase competed against each other all last year. You know, centers are really hard to find. Centers are a tough commodity to find right now out there. And we have two really good ones, and that's a big advantage. Obviously we have practice guys as well that are taller than both of them that they can go against every day, and that helps them. But I think it's a big advantage to have two centers of their quality on our team.

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