

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Lisa Bluder Women's Basketball

LISA BLUDER: Good morning, and thank you for coming out to learn a little more about our basketball team for this upcoming season. If I were to describe our team right now, I would say we're really focused. They are ready to go on last year's 24-8 record and NCAA tournament appearance.

It's easy to be enthused about this group of women. They come every day to practice with great energy, with a positive attitude. They have a tremendous focus, and they just want to get that much better every single day. They're working on that, understanding that every day is an opportunity for growth. On top of that, they care about each other, and they're fun to be around.

I feel like whenever you have experience as a point guard and have an inside-outside attack, in my experience it's been a pretty good recipe for success. And I think we have good experience at all three of those vital positions, and it all starts Megan. It doesn't hurt to have the Preseason All-Big Ten Player of the Year, returning All-American back for her senior season.

Megan led the country in three different categories last year, points per game, field goal percentage, and field goals made. In fact, she was ranked top nine in nine different statistical categories. And sometimes I think it's easy to throw around a number because you just get used to it. And you throw it around not understanding their full impact. When you think that one woman in the past decade has averaged over 24 points and 12 rebounds besides Megan, it kind of puts it into perspective, her accomplishments.

Megan worked hard this summer. She's continued to improve her game. She's not resting on her laurels. But I also know that many people are expecting Megan to kind of replicate the numbers of last year. I think it's going to be really difficult to do, because I think every coach in America is planning on how they're going to control Megan. With that, the rest of our team is going to reap the benefits of that focus.

One of those people is Hannah Stewart. Hannah will



be moving into our starting lineup this year, the forward position. I'm so excited for Hannah, she's worked hard the last three years, she's been diligent. She's stayed positive and focused. She's been voted a captain of our basketball team, that is the respect that she has by her peers.

She runs if the floor like a deer. She gets out and runs hard. She can start up in transition, she's strong, she can rebound. I think she's very, very deserving of that.

Another player that's very deserving of a good senior year is Tania Davis. To have an injury-free year would be terrific for our team's success, and so deserving for her. I think people forget how good Tania is because she hasn't been in the last two full Big Ten seasons.

She's our X-factor. She's one of our best 3-point shooters. She's one of our best free-throw shooters. She gives us great depth at that point guard position. She is an amazing passer. In fact, I still get some of those, "oh, wow" moments in practice when she just puts up this unbelievable pass, and just threads the needle.

So she definitely sees the court and understands the game so well, so having Tania back, and I'm not going to say she's back at full strength quite yet, but she'll be back and contributing for our team.

Kathleen Doyle is another person I'm excited about. She was second team All Big Ten last year, preseason All Big Ten this year. Kathleen is really playing well. She is shooting the three with confidence right now. She just looks comfortable with her game. She's not trying to prove anything to anybody. She's got great leadership on the floor. She's running the show really well for us. And I am very excited about her game this year.

Then Lexi Sevillian and Makenzie Meyer, our outside attack, both very good shooters and everyone knows they could light it up any night at any time.

We have four freshmen this year. Unfortunately, Kate Martin will be taking a medical redshirt. Our 6-foot freshman from St. Louis, Illinois. Kate was a really highly recruited player coming in here, and unfortunately her first weekend while she was on

campus she went back to Illinois to compete in her All-Star Game and suffered an ACL tear at that point. So she will get the medical red shirt for this year, and we'll still have her for four years, and Kate's got a great attitude and she's ready to learn and continue to get better for those next years.

Monika Czinano, we brought her in as a post position from Watertown, Minnesota, 6'3" post player. I'm telling you, she's almost as physical as Megan. She has a great motor. She is learning every day and going against Megan every day, and you cannot believe the improvement that we've seen in her from last June until now.

Monika is kind of the future in our post position, and so it's important that she gets those valuable minutes this year and that confidence. But, obviously, with Megan and Hannah right above her, the cupboards not bare, so she's going to be able to mature as a freshman in my opinion.

Logan Cook is from Iowa City West and she has been playing well. And just keeps getting better. She gets more comfortable all the time. She'll be playing the power forward position for us but can foresee moving her to some small forward as the year goes on. She can stretch the defense because she is a very nice 3-point shooter, and she also has great length on defense. I have very high hopes for Logan.

Tomi Taiwo from Carmel, Indiana is a wing player. She can shoot the ball as well. And Tomi's just going to take some time to get comfortable with the college game and the pace of the game. But I also have great expectations for her.

Then our schedule, demanding once again. We try to challenge ourselves, and I feel like we're doing that same thing again this year.

We open up a week from Friday against Oral Roberts, but then quickly get into some difficult action. Obviously, we're playing our three in-state schools, hosting Iowa State, hosting UNI, and traveling to Drake, the Missouri Valley Conference champions. We're also traveling to Western Kentucky. They were in the NCAA Tournament last year and they're conference champions.

Over the Thanksgiving break, we'll be playing West Virginia, a team receiving votes in the top 25 poll, and also Florida State is in our bracket, another team receiving votes in the Top 25 poll. And then we, of course, travel to Notre Dame, the reigning national champion, and the unanimous number one pick right now in the country, we'll be traveling to their place for the Big Ten/ACC Challenge.

We have another tremendous schedule. We go to 18 games this year in the Big Ten, which is up from 16 last year. So that's going to be more challenging having more Big Ten games and having a longer Big Ten season.

But we are excited for the challenge. I know that you're excited to have the opportunity to meet the women and talk to them.

Q. This is the first time any of these players have been on a team with so many accolades. Is that something that you're getting out in front of with this group or let them handle it organically? How have they done with all the stuff that's come in?

LISA BLUDER: I think there is a lot of excitement around our team. But it starts with our team. I think the team is excited about the possibilities. I think they have high expectations for themselves.

I don't think that they feel any pressure or anything like that. I think they're enjoying the experience, and I want them to have the confidence that they can perform at that accolades that we're receiving right now.

Q. Do you have a tentative lineup set so far, or are you kind of keeping an open mind? Is it close?

LISA BLUDER: Megan will be at the five, Hannah will be at the four, Makenzie Meyer will be at the three. You know, really, what we don't know right now for sure is about Tania. Kathleen's going to be in the starting lineup, so will it be Tania or will it be Lexi? We did scrimmage this weekend and did not play Tania, we just didn't think it was necessary at this point.

Right now I'm not even sure if we're going to scrimmage her in our exhibition against Dakota Wesleyan on Tuesday. So we'll wait and see.

Q. How limited is Tania in practice. You mentioned she wasn't quite a hundred percent?

LISA BLUDER: She's doing almost everything. But, we're just not really kind of pushing the envelope on it. We just don't feel like there is a need to. So she hasn't been like going over five minutes for a scrimmage. We kind of back her off a little bit on some of the defensive things that we're doing. The thing with Tania being a senior, she doesn't maybe need quite as many reps as the freshmen and sophomores do, and she's such a knowledgeable player that missing those reps won't hurt her. I just want her to be very, very comfortable and confident before she takes the floor.

Q. Hannah being a 91 percent free-throw shooter, would you like to see her put the ball on the floor and maybe go to the basket a little more, or are you

more comfortable leaving her out there and giving Megan room?

LISA BLUDER: No, she needs to be able to attack as well. I think if you're labeled just a shooter, you become easier to guard. She certainly is a shooter, like Lexi is with our team, and that's an asset that we love. But at the same time, if you're just going to be a shooter, somebody can really get up into your face, and now all of a sudden, that side isn't as available.

So we definitely want her to be able to read defenses and put the ball on the floor. Because like you say, she's a tremendous free-throw shooter.

Q. What do you expect from opposing defenses this year? Obviously, last year they were adjusting. But are you guys about ready for anything?

LISA BLUDER: Everything and anything. We're going to see doubles, triples, we're going to see everything against her, just like we did last year. So we tried to kind of give the team a different look every day in practice for that, but I think she's -- she understands that she can score doubles and triples. She did it last year, and I don't think she shies away from that.

Q. The last couple years nobody was giving Megan the recognition that she probably deserved. How has she handled it this year? It's like she is finally getting attention that she actually deserved probably last year?

LISA BLUDER: You're right. It's not like she just burst on the scene over the summer. She had a tremendous junior year. She had a tremendous sophomore year. So it is nice to see that she's getting that respect. But I don't see Megan getting worried about that. I see a very mature young lady that can handle it. That's keeping her head on straight. That continues to work to improve, and has that wherewithal, I can get better. When you have an athlete that's getting these kind of accolades that still wants to get better and understands they can get better, I think they've got a pretty level head on. Megan is amazing to me. She's an All-American that has no ego, and that's hard to find.

There is a difference between confidence and ego. She has confidence. She's worked hard for that confidence. But she's definitely an All-American with no ego.

Q. You've used a lot of 3-point shooting and it's been a staple of your team. Is that even more valuable this year because you guys want to keep shooting from the perimeter so Megan's just not so boxed in all the time?

LISA BLUDER: We have to. I think we have to be dangerous from outside otherwise it makes it so much harder on Megan, and it makes it hard to get her the

ball. I think that we have to be an outside threat as well.

Q. Talk about Megan being a good scorer and rebounder, but she really set Chase up last year with some really nice passes when she's doubled. I mean, that's obviously some part of her game.

LISA BLUDER: It's something we work on all the time because we know it's going to happen. Where she's double or triple, it's just where is it coming from? What angle is that double or triple going to come from? But definitely Chase was the recipient and had a really nice senior year because of the attention that was given to Megan. I foresee Hannah getting that same kind of opportunity this year.

Q. Coach, you've had good success with players from Iowa City West recently. Logan Cook, what sticks out about her?

LISA BLUDER: Logan has got a good motor. She's very focused. She is a stress shooter. She's a better outside shooter, a better stress shooter than I thought she was going to be. Her length really causes problems for people on defense. She can really get out and guard the ball. She can guard, dribble drive, or any of that. She's able to contain the ball for somebody of her size pretty well.

Q. Could this be your best team at Iowa?

LISA BLUDER: I think it has all the capabilities to. Again, I think what we have the experience at those key positions, I think it definitely has the possibility.

Q. You talk about the X-factor, but her progressive ties comes all the way back, and you guys can weave her back in the way she was before she got hurt, how pivotal is that in making everything flow?

LISA BLUDER: We're a better team with Tania on the floor. She is such a good floor general out there, and so is Kathleen. And I'm lucky to have two really good point guards on my team, and both scoring point guards. They're not just set up other people point guards, but they have the ability to do both, and that's a nice luxury to have.

But there is no doubt that Tania makes everybody on the team better when she's on the court, because she has the ability to see the floor. She knows the game so well, knows when to attack, when to pull it back, when to get the ball to whom, and she's really good at that.

Q. How impressed have you been with how she's handled the last few injuries. The long rehab process and in terms of her mental stability?

LISA BLUDER: I would never wish that upon any athlete to have back-to-back ACL tears like Tania's had. It's so much to endure. When you're taking away

the thing that you love, the thing that you came to Iowa to do, to play on this team, and that's taken away from you, that's really hard to handle, not only physically rehabbing that ACL tear, but mentally as well. Not really being a part of the team on the court. I think that's really difficult. It is kind of a part of their identity, and that's taken away.

I respect Tania so much because she's been able to keep a positive attitude. We petitioned to try to get her another year, and that fell through. For her to be able to stay positive and stay engaged with this team, I think has really been challenging, and she's met that challenge head on.

Q. How has the team grown through that adversity? Have other players had to step up and maybe played a role they weren't used to?

LISA BLUDER: We gave Alexis a lot of opportunities last year as a red-shirt freshman. She was put into that starting position. Kathleen had to shoulder a whole lot more last year, and I think that's made her such a better player because of her having to take on all that responsibility last year instead of sharing it with Tania, so I think her game grew the last couple years.

Q. Coach, the tough loss to Minnesota in the tournament, and then to Creighton in the NCAA Tournament, how did those serve maybe the rallying cry for your group this year?

LISA BLUDER: When you come into this summer and you have to use all those type of things as motivation. Summer can be long. This year we expanded our hours that we're spending with our team from two to four hours. So we were in the gym with them a whole lot more than we have been in the previous years with that NCAA rule change.

I think they use it as great motivation. I don't think that they're dwelling on it. I don't think it kept them up at night after the first couple of weeks. But certainly they have something to prove, and they're handling it just like you'd want them to.

Q. You seem willing to embrace the expectations that are made on your players. Is that just the confidence you have in this team?

LISA BLUDER: I have unbelievable confidence in them. I believe this team can be very good. We're challenging ourselves there's no doubt about it. But I do have so much belief in Megan, the whole group. It's just a good feel.

When you're around our team and you feel how much they care about each other, how positive it is, you can't help but feel like this has really good opportunities.

Q. What do you guys think is a successful season for you this year?

LISA BLUDER: A longer trip in the NCAA Tournament is certainly something that we'd like to have. I will tell you kind of their attitude this summer somebody ranked us at 17th and they were mad. You like that. You want your team to want even more and you want them to be hungry like that, and they are.