

# University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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## Lisa Bluder Women's Basketball

LISA BLUDER: Good morning. Appreciate you all taking some time this morning to come out and to learn a little bit more about Iowa women's basketball for this upcoming season.

As you can look at our roster, you can kind of see we're small in numbers, but I can assure you this group is mighty in spirit. This group has so much grit to them. They've been a joy to coach so far. It's exciting going into this year.

We have 11 players on our roster, but I feel that is all the pieces that we need to compete. Since we only have 11, I thought I'd go through them briefly, each one of them, so you can get to know them better.

We have two seniors. Chase Coley, had a tremendous sophomore campaign, and she's rebounding for an impactful senior season as well. At 6'3", Chase is so quick. She's so agile. She runs the floor well. Her long arms cause havoc defensively. She just moves incredibly well.

Carly Mohns spent most of her career, unfortunately, in the training room. As you may remember, she was just about to move into the starting lineup her sophomore season when she tore her ACL, and since then, she's just had injury after injury re-occurring to her. I'm telling you, if there's anybody that deserves to have a good senior season, it's Carly. She just deserves to have this. I really hope for her sake that she gets this opportunity.

I think our junior class is outstanding. Megan Gustafson returns for her junior year as the third best shooter in America. That's a pretty amazing number. She shot 65 percent last year, and last year she ranked in the top 30 in seven different categories. She ranked in the top 30 not only in field goal percentage, but double-doubles, field goals made, total rebounds per game, and total points. As a sophomore. I don't think I've ever coached someone that is such an eager learner and somebody that works as hard on every single possession as Megan. She is an amazing player.



Tania Davis, named to the All-Big Ten Freshman Team during her freshman campaign. She was having a spectacular sophomore year when she tore her ACL at Michigan. That was a big blow to our team because Tania can do things for our team that nobody else can do. Losing that leadership, losing that depth hurt us last year.

I can't go anywhere without everybody asking me, whether at the grocery store, the gas station, or wherever, how's Tania doing? I know people are very interested in knowing. I know I probably have the biggest smile on my face about this one -- she's doing really well and way ahead of schedule. I anticipated having her back by Christmas, but she will be suited up and ready to go for the first game. Again, nobody's happier about that one than me.

Hannah Stewart shot 55 percent from the field as a sophomore last year. I think she sometimes gets lost in the shuffle because everybody's focus is on Megan and how good of a post player she is. We have another really good post player in Hannah Stewart. She was our second best field goal percentage shooter on our team last year. She's one of our best offensive rebounders. She led our team in blocks per minute played last year. She's fast. She's strong. She's an athletic specimen. And she was also voted captain by her teammates this year, and that shows her strong leadership abilities that she brings to our team.

Sophomores. I always feel that you see the biggest jump in players between their freshman and sophomore years. I think part of that is due to our outstanding strength and conditioning, Lindsay Dinkelman, that we have. She spends more time with them in the summer than us coaches get to. I think Lindsay does a great job developing their confidence through the strength room, through the conditioning aspect of the game.

But I also think just because of their experience that they gained last year, and all of our freshmen last year that are now sophomores gained an incredible amount of experience. Experience usually gives you confidence and all three of our sophomores made really good jumps.

I'll start with Kathleen Doyle, voted All-Big Ten

Freshman last year, was invited to the under 19 USA Basketball trials, was able to compete against some of the best in the nation there. She did a terrific job. This year she's faster, she's headier, she's looking for more scoring opportunities than she did last year while still maintaining that aggressiveness on the defensive end. Kathleen's a natural leader, and she also was selected captain. When you have a sophomore selected captain by their peers, that speaks volumes as to what her leadership potential is for this team.

Makenzie Meyer is much more comfortable on the court this year. You can see it in her expression. You can see it in the way she carries herself. Last year I felt she was our best 3-point shooter. Our expectation is that she's going to demand as much respect on the floor as Melissa Dixon did in her campaign when she was the best 3-point shooter in the nation. She is simply just playing with a lightness, a joy you need to have to be successful. I know it's only her sophomore year, but I think she's got a great future ahead of her.

Amanda Ollinger. Although Amanda only played in 21 games last year, you didn't really get to see what she's capable of doing on the court. This year you're going to see much, much more out of Amanda. I've always felt Amanda is a really tough matchup for people because of her height, she can post people up, because of her shooting ability. She can take you off the bounce or bring a bigger player outside and shoot over them. But she's also in a very aggressive offensive rebounder, which I love. So I think that's going to be a pleasant surprise to see the additions that Amanda brings to our team this year.

And that takes us to our freshmen class. Lexi Sevillian redshirted last year, and that was in order to balance our classes and also for her to gain some really good experience. She took advantage of those things. It's paid dividends. Lexi is a confident shooter. You're going to, I think, enjoy watching her on the floor. She has quick hands. She's got quick feet on the defensive end. And even though she's listed as a freshman, she made that same jump as her classmates made.

Paula Valino Ramos, is a 6'3" center from the northwest region of Spain. We felt this summer we needed some additional depth in the inside position. I actually first saw Paula play online, and I watched her play online. There was a Spanish national tournament going on. And then when I first made contact with Paula, I was impressed with her desire to come to an American university, a great American university, and learn. She wants to be a doctor. And as much -- learn as much not only about the medical field but as much about basketball, and contribute in just whatever way possible. Paula is definitely an eager learner in both of those areas.

But believe me, she earns her scholarship every day because she's got to go battle against Megan, and nobody wants to do that. I can't get gray squad guys that want to come in and do that because it's a hard job. She probably never realized she was going to be coming to America and playing against one of the best centers in America, but that's what she's challenged herself to.

And lastly, Zion Sanders is a 5'8" guard walk-on from Evansville, Indiana. This summer Zion walked on our team in order to help us, again, with some depth, and really tried to help facilitate practices in whatever way possible, just kind of playing any position that we need her to play, and she's done a very good job with that.

But our schedule includes matchups against in-state rivals. We're playing at UNI this year. We're playing at Iowa State. Getting the opportunity to host Drake, and then we'll also host last year's seventh ranked team in the country in Florida State and the Big Ten ACC challenge. And then our season kicks off with some NCAA -- our Hawkeye Challenge includes three teams that were in the NCAA Tournament last year -- Western Kentucky, Missouri, and our first opponent is Quinnipiac, who advanced to the Sweet 16 last year.

I think a very challenging schedule for our team. Our Thanksgiving tournament, as you may have heard, was supposed to be played in Puerto Rico, and we're moving that tournament to Ft. Lauderdale because of, obviously, the effects of the hurricane. Our team is eager to get the season under way. I know you're eager to get to meet them. But if you have any questions, I'll be happy to entertain them.

**Q. With Amanda, how will her role be different from last year? Where are you seeing the most improvement out of her?**

LISA BLUDER: Her role is going to change because she's going to be in the top ten players on our team, the top nine or ten players on our team. Usually those are the players that are playing all the time. Last year she was kind of in and out of that mix.

I think this year you're just going to see her because her role has changed, because we have to have it change. We need her to contribute. She's going to be asked to do that, and she's looking forward to that opportunity.

**Q. You said that Tania can do things that no one else on the team can do. What are some of those things?**

LISA BLUDER: You know on SportsCenter last year that okey-doke she had going to the hoop, that's pretty

impressive. She just has an ability to get to the rim and shoot over people that are much taller than her. She has no fear of going in there. I was quite honestly nervous about that part of her game changing because of the tear on her ACL because it was a move like that where she tore it. First practice of the year, she took it in, and I looked at one of my assistants and said, well, that's over. That's not going to hold her back.

She just has the ability to change speeds so quickly, so efficiently. She handles the ball amazingly well. Both her and Doyle are great passers. We definitely have two unbelievable passing point guards.

**Q. What has amazed you the most about her comeback? Is it that she beat the deadline when you thought she'd be ready?**

LISA BLUDER: That's what I think is the most impressive, how fast she's come back from this. Give credit to Jennie Sertterh, our athletic trainer. She spent a lot of time working with her this summer and last spring. Her sprint to come back so fast and really not have it -- again, sometimes the mental part is the toughest thing, I think, for kids. I saw that in Theairra Taylor. Remember she had three of them. Mentally, she really struggled with that. Tania doesn't seem to have any of that, or at least she's not letting it show.

**Q. When she does come back, I assume both she and Doyle will be on the court at the same time most of the time. Who will be the point guard, or will they just kind of share that role, one and two?**

LISA BLUDER: They'll definitely share the role. We're going to have a system that really, I think, showcases both of their abilities at point guard even when they're on the floor at the same time.

**Q. Do you have an idea of how you want to mix everything up and try and make sure that everybody's not tired and that you're mixing it up pretty well?**

LISA BLUDER: We have 11 players. So I have to be careful of their legs, but I'm going to worry about their legs in practice and not during games. You worry about their legs, but you also remember they're 18 and 20-year-olds. Remember how much energy you had when you were an 18 and 20-year-old. When the lights come on, the fans come out, they'll be ready to go.

So it's just me having to adjust practice, making them a little bit shorter so that they're not spending so much time there.

**Q. Megan's jump freshman to sophomore year, especially is so sizable and noticeable. Now sophomore to junior year, what are you realistically expecting from Megan?**

LISA BLUDER: Definitely, I want her to continue to improve. I'm never happy with where they are. I always want to push them to make them better, and she's no different. She continues to want to focus on her rebounding. She averaged 10.1 rebounds a game. She wants to average more.

She wants to be more of a vocal leader. She wants to grow in that part of her leadership skills. She wants to be able to handle double-teams. She knows they're going to come at her. She's still focused and prepared to get better every day.

**Q. Last year you said that in retrospect maybe you had underestimated replacing Sam's and Bethany's position. Have you looked at replacing Ally's production and Ally's position for this program and this particular team?**

LISA BLUDER: Ally, obviously, we know she left here as the all-time leading scorer. She was a four-year starter for us, just an amazing basketball player and obviously a tremendous student as well. But one person is not going to replace Ally. Just like one person can't replace Sam Logic. Everybody's got to get better. For us to replace Ally, it's got to be a group effort.

I believe our team is up to the challenge. I think they did a great job this summer and all embracing that, that Ally was going to be gone and that we all need to get better, and I feel like they did.

**Q. Do you see a little bit of Sam Logic in Kathleen Doyle as she takes the next step in her sophomore year?**

LISA BLUDER: I do compare the two. I think that Kathleen was a better offensive player than Sam was at this point, but they both kind of have that grit to them. They both have that kind of tenacious attitude on the floor. You have to have that. You have to have that moxie on the floor, and they both have that. They're both tremendous ball handlers, passers. I think that Kathleen has the edge on the defensive side and on the offensive side outside. Sam was probably a better inside scoring threat.

**Q. You said that when Tania was down with her injury, that it really affected your team. Was that more the offensive end or the defensive end or just in general overall?**

LISA BLUDER: It was really both sides of it. Tania is a good defensive player, but it was more the depth and the leadership we missed more than anything. Just having that one more person that can do the types of things that she and Doyle can do.

**Q. Last year you went with a five in, five out**

**philosophy for a lot of the nonconference season. Are you going to do that again, or do you have kind of a pecking order right now?**

LISA BLUDER: We will not be doing that this year. Last year we really did that based on the depth that we had, that we wanted to keep more people engaged early in the season, save their legs, that sort of thing. This year those aren't the things that we're worried about right now. With 11, they know they're all going to be able to compete, be a part of the team, be a part of the action. So I think that solves that problem.

**Q. Is there a rotation that you have right now, though, that you're thinking maybe in the starting lineup and the first couple off the bench?**

LISA BLUDER: I haven't really come up with that starting lineup yet. Don't need to do that for a couple of weeks. I think the competition in practice is always great for those type of things. I haven't really thought of that yet.

**Q. Obviously, I'm sure you hear about every girl on the team, but when the vote for captains was conducted, what does it, A, say for Kathleen and Hannah both being voted, and B, were you pleasantly surprised by that outcome?**

LISA BLUDER: You can see leadership skills, the kids that come in as natural leaders, and both of those women are natural leaders. It didn't surprise me. Sometimes you're surprised at a sophomore already being named captain. But at the same time, those two are natural leaders. We tell our team what we expect out of a captain. When we told the team what we were expecting, it was kind of a no-brainer for them.

**Q. How big of a role do you see Paula playing this year?**

LISA BLUDER: Not significant. Coming in, she knows that. I told her she wouldn't have a significant part for our team coming on the court in game day. For her, really helping our team happens in practice every single day.

**Q. How are her English skills? Is she easy to communicate with?**

LISA BLUDER: Excellent. In fact, I've challenged her with giving me some Spanish words that we can name some plays after. So she's excited about that. She speaks terrific English. It's pretty neat.

There's already been some Spanish professors that have reached out to her and some classmates that are from the same region. On Saturday night, she was over at their house having dinner, and she got to speak Spanish all night. She was excited on Sunday because she was able to do that. It shows you again our community. The professors on this campus reach out to

these kids from different countries and it's amazing.

**Q. Having missed the NCAA Tournament a couple of years in a row, have you seen more of a sense of urgency, especially with how close you were to making it last year?**

LISA BLUDER: I just think there's such a great desire. There's not a sense of urgency. It drives you. It's exciting that you have this extra really motivation. So, yeah, we definitely want to be back in the NCAA Tournament. I think it's something that Iowa women's basketball is known for and we want to be there.

**Q. Nonconference comes first, but Big Ten landscape, what do you see there? What are you looking for? How do you guys stack up?**

LISA BLUDER: I think Ohio State is the clear favorite. They return one of the best players in America in Kelsey Mitchell for her senior year, finally. They're definitely the favorites right now.

Our schedule is a little unusual this year in that five of our first seven games are on the road. That's a tough way to start your Big Ten season, right? But the nice thing about that, when you look at it academically we don't start school until January 17th or around there, so we're traveling a lot when we're not in school. That's the best time for athletes that are worried about their academics to travel, and it takes one stress away. So I would rather have those games early when they're not in school.

And then of our last nine games, six of them are at home. So I think we can get a nice roll going into the Big Ten Tournament. The way that played out is different this year and to our advantage.

The other thing that's different this year is our doubles. Last year our doubles were Maryland. We've had tough doubles the last couple years. And I'm not saying that the doubles we have this year are not tough, but they're not the No. 1 ranked team in the conference either. Our doubles this year are all border rivals, and that gives our fans an opportunity to go see us play at those places. We didn't get doubles against border rivals in the past. So I like that this year. Our doubles are against, I believe, Nebraska, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

**Q. The off-season that this team had with the three departures, how many times in your mind, kind of during the off-season, did you think your team was going to perhaps look one way, and then the next week you had to readjust how you thought about the way they might look?**

LISA BLUDER: I think that's coaching. That's part of what you do every day when you're on the court, when

you're coaching a game, when you're balancing a team. You know, you make adjustments, and I think that's what we did this summer.

**Q. What's your take on the Big Ten announcing that they're going to expand the Big Ten Conference to 18 games for the women?**

LISA BLUDER: I think it was natural when the men went to 20, that we go to 18. I think that it's going to be good for those of us that have been on the cusp of making the NCAA Tournament because it should improve our RPI and allow us in. It's kind of unusual the last two years we went to 16, and we were not in it. The year we were 18, we were in there. So it should hopefully raise the RPI in our conference because now, unfortunately, some of the coaches in our league were not scheduling as difficultly as they should have been, so this is kind of mandating that a little.

**Q. Would you like to see the women go to 20?**

LISA BLUDER: I'm not going to go that far, okay?  
(laughter) Let's give 18 a try first.