

University of Iowa Media Conference

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Coach Lisa Bluder

Media Day Press Conference



LISA BLUDER: Our spring and summer have been very different. Kind of unusual, but I'm really happy with our team's commitment and their attention to detail of focusing and not worrying about the unknown, but instead preparing like the Big Ten Tournament is tomorrow.

I couldn't ask for a better group, how they've prepared in coming to practice every day with masks and having to practice, and just being very aware when they're away from the arena how they have to be so careful to protect themselves and to protect our team. I've just been extremely proud of the young women and what they've done.

You look at this year, obviously the last couple years we've lost a lot in graduation, and when you think of the last three years, a Big Ten Player of the Year has been wearing an Iowa women's basketball jersey, so that's a lot of loss over the last couple years.

But we're kind of focusing instead on what we return, and obviously I want to start that conversation with Monika Czinano. Monika was a first team all-Big Ten selection as a sophomore. It's really remarkable. She was the second best field goal shooter in America last year. If she would have made two more field goals, she would have led the country in field goal percentage, two more field goals over the course of 30 games. Her improvement from freshman to sophomore year I think was nothing but remarkable, and her commitment. I'm so excited to have Monika for a few more years, and I think she's just continued her growth over the past year.

Lexi Sevillian returns as a fifth-year senior for us. She is also a captain along with Kate Martin and Zion Sanders. All three of those women have done a really terrific job of their leadership during this uncertain time.

McKenna Warnock returns. McKenna was on the all freshmen team, just a terrific power forward for us, she rebounds well. In addition she can really be physical inside but also bring people out for three-point shooting, and so she really can stretch the defense, as well.

Gabbie Marshall has also really improved, and really I feel like all of our returners made some significant progress over the summer.

We also as you know have the 17th ranked recruiting class coming in here. Caitlin Clark leads that, Caitlin being a five-star recruit. She was the fourth best player in America last year, the second best point guard in America, from Dowling Catholic. She was a McDonald's All-American, the Iowa Player of the Year, the Gatorade Player of the Year. She's won two gold medals in USA Basketball and she holds state records for most points in a game with 60 and most three-pointers in a game with 13. Some pretty remarkable statistics, and Caitlin is coming here expecting to contribute right away, and she will be contributing right away. We're excited to have that next point guard. We've had so many great point guards come through our system, and excited about this one.

Lauren Jensen also is joining that recruiting class. Lauren is from Lakeville (North) High School. She shot 45 percent from three-point range in high school, 25-point-per-game average, and she was a finalist for Miss Minnesota Basketball, and for those of you that don't know, the No. 1 player in America was from the state of Minnesota. Not bad to be a finalist to the No. 1 player in America.

Sharon Goodman is an Iowan that comes from Crestwood High School. She is the all-time (leading scorer) -- she was the Player of the Year for 3A in her junior season, all-state selection, as well.

Shateah Wetering is from Montezuma, Iowa, our closest recruit, the all-time leading scorer at Montezuma, and she's also won two national AAU basketball tournaments.

Our schedule I can't really talk about. We still don't have one. It's kind of an unusual situation. That's kind of what we talk about with our players. Never have we gone into a season not knowing who we're going to play or when we're going to play until this year. It is what it is. We just have to be ready for everybody.

We're trying to schedule our three in-state schools along with two other non-conference. We'll only have five non-conference this year, and we've moved our Big Ten schedule from 18 to 20 along with playing the Big Ten



Tournament a week later than it has been.

It's still a work in progress, but I do know the Big Ten is going to be -- I probably say this every year, but I really believe it, as strong as it's ever been. We just did not graduate a lot from the conference. There was some within-conference transfers, but obviously those players are experienced and have all been given immediate eligibility.

Q. You said last year not to compare Monika to Megan, but I thought Monika went to her left better than Megan went to her right her sophomore year because Monika seemed like she could score either way.

LISA BLUDER: I think that's a really good point. I think that's true. I think Monika uses her left probably better than Megan used her right as far as as a sophomore. But Monika continues to improve. She's very physical. She's more of a vocal leader this year than she was last year, and she knows the team is counting on her to put the basket in the hole.

Q. Did that surprise you a little bit with her field goal percentage? She was just tough down low.

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, I'd be silly to say that I wouldn't be surprised. I mean, come on. She comes from being really a very role player her freshman year to being the second best field goal shooter in America. Who wouldn't be surprised by that? That was remarkable.

Q. Talk about her budding leadership, and as you look at her career she kind of had the ability to learn early and watch Megan and then have a bigger role last year and then now it's kind of her team in a sense in terms of what you count on. Just in terms of molding her into that leader, that person that you hear the most, how has she transitioned into that role among other things?

LISA BLUDER: I think she's doing a great job leading. She's not a captain. I think as a sophomore we needed her to work on so many other things and concentrate on so many other things that I didn't want that to be on her plate, as well, but she is a leader just because that's the type of person she is.

I don't want to say this is her team. I don't think anybody ever feels that way with our basketball teams. We try to be really balanced. But certainly having a great inside attack like Monika opens up things for our three-point shooting. We still want to play the same style. We want to get up and down and run, and she does a great job with that in

the inside position, but also we want to pass the ball really well. She's a wonderful target to pass the ball to. She's got great hands.

Q. You talked about leadership and all that stuff, and you lose that in Kathleen. Where does that come from?

LISA BLUDER: That's what I'm really missing the most right now is that emotional leadership. You know, Kathleen just wore her heart on her sleeve, and sometimes that can be a detriment but most times it's really positive. I just think that a lot of times as a point guard a lot of people feed off of your energy, and she just brought that all the time, in practice, in games. So other people are kind of having to step up in that role.

Again, I'm not really expecting Caitlin as a freshman to do that, but people like Kate Martin and Monika are really doing a good job with that.

Q. What have you seen from Caitlin so far and just your thoughts on her?

LISA BLUDER: You'd better be ready to guard her when she crosses the half-court line. She's a player that loves to shoot the ball and has tremendous range. I think sometimes her passing gets overlooked. We have had so many 'oh, wow' moments in practice already, highlight-type passes. We had one today, like put that in the highlight film already because it was so unbelievable.

I think sometimes people overlook how good of a passer she is just because she's such a tremendous scorer.

Q. You've not had somebody come in with her credentials right away and expecting big things from Game 1. As you've gotten to see her mental makeup more up close and how she's handled all that came in high school and will here, as well, what has impressed you the most from that aspect of her?

LISA BLUDER: I love how coachable she is. She really wants to learn. She wants to get better. She asks questions. She comes in and watches film. I've been very, very pleased with how coachable she is and how much she understands she still has to learn.

Sometimes people can come in with that kind of accolades and think they know it all, and that's not at all how Caitlin acts.

Q. Last year we saw McKenna Warnock step up in big some big against top 25 teams and really felt like she was taking over at the end of games and as a freshman

that's pretty special. What do you think her ceiling is, particularly when you think about performances in games like that?

LISA BLUDER: McKenna just did a tremendous job, and the reward at the end of the year being on the all-freshman team was very deserved. I think McKenna is going to probably move into our starting position this year as a power forward. All four of our guards kind of all do the same thing basically, but I think McKenna has gotten stronger. She can go both hands a little bit better than she has. I think that McKenna could be one of our top rebounders.

We lose Amanda. Amanda was our best offensive rebounder. We need offensive rebounds, and I think we can get that out of McKenna this year.

Q. You mentioned this is the third year in a row you're coming to this press conference and you've lost the Big Ten Player of the Year. Do you think that there might be a player on this roster, maybe a couple options who could be in competition to make it a fourth straight Iowa women's basketball player as Big Ten Player of the Year?

LISA BLUDER: I don't know about fourth straight, but I think ultimately we could have one of those players in an Iowa jersey this year. I don't know if it's going to happen this year but I think ultimately it could. We're a young team, and we're optimistic but we also realize that what other people in the Big Ten have returning, and they're very senior dominated teams, and we're not. We could possibly start not have any seniors in our starting lineup.

Q. How much will you need Clark to score? Obviously that's what she was known for in high school. How much is she going to have to do that this year?

LISA BLUDER: I think she's going to have to do it because that's her game, and I think she will be out of sorts if she's not doing that, if she doesn't have the ball in her hands, if she's not looking for that. I don't think we'll see the best Caitlin unless she is really looking to score.

But again, I cautioned her and really all of us that she's not going to put up the numbers she did in high school. She averaged 35 points a game or something like that. No, we're a balanced team. She's smart, and she's played with enough good players with the USA Basketball experience that she understands that and she knows this isn't going to be a one-woman show, and she understood that when we recruited her.

Q. What was the sales pitch you think you sold her

on?

LISA BLUDER: Taking us back to the Final Four. That's really something that we want to do. We want to get back to the Final Four, and it hasn't been done since we've been here. We were one game shy a couple years ago.

I think wearing the Iowa jersey is also something special for young ladies that grow up in this state, to be able to put on the University of Iowa jersey and walk out that tunnel into our great attendance that we get here. It's pretty special.

Q. You always have great crowds at games; what is it going to be like to not have fans, and how is that going to impact the game?

LISA BLUDER: We're worried about that because our fan support has been so outstanding. The last two years we've been in the top ten in the nation in attendance, and I am concerned because I think they bring a great energy to our arena. We haven't lost here for two and a half years. Part of that is because we've had good teams. Part of that is because we have a great home-court advantage.

Our home-court advantage was based on our very vocal, knowledgeable fans, and not having that I think is going to take a little bit of our energy away, and we're going to have to find our own energy to play this year.

Now, I always think that's kind of a silly thing to say because who wouldn't want to play the game you love as a 20-year old. You should have energy all the time, but it sure is nice late in the game when you have that crowd really get behind you and really drive you.

Q. Is that more challenging with a younger team like you might have this year?

LISA BLUDER: I think it is because they don't know what it was like to play in Carver, but they also don't understand how to play 40 minutes, right. They've not done that before. They don't understand how physical the game is. They don't understand all those things.

Having that comfort of having all those fans behind you taken away is a little bit of a detriment.

Q. Caitlin played with USA Basketball, got a lot of those high-level games, so do you think that will maybe give her a little head start on what to expect, the physicality of the game?

LISA BLUDER: I absolutely do. I think when you have experiences like that, when you're playing against not only



the best in the United States but the best in the world, you have a head start on everybody. I mean, you know the game, you know how it's played at that level. I think it's a huge advantage.

Q. You and Jan have kind of built a reputation as you had Megan, now having Monika doing what she does. What's the trajectory potential for Sharon?

LISA BLUDER: I am so excited about Sharon Goodman. One of our downfalls was that we didn't have a good backup 5. And now this year, we have two exceptional post players. Sharon is playing as well as Monika in practice. Right now, Monika has the start because of the experience level, but I am not going to hesitate to go to the bench and to use Sharon. To have the comfort of knowing that you have 10 fouls to give down there is tremendous, and us not having to change our game plan so much when Monika needs a break or gets into foul trouble.

Sharon is strong. She has improved her hands. She runs the floor. She is shooting about 70 percent in practice, the same as Monika. I have been extremely pleased with Sharon Goodman.

Q. How do you see three-year eligibility affecting the women's game? For example, Monika could play three more years at Iowa because of the eligibility. How do you see that unfolding?

LISA BLUDER: I could see it being a real positive. If Monika decides to come back for that extra year, boy, to have her be in that starting position for four years or having that much experience, I just know a lot of people would love to have two posts like we have right now in their freshman and junior. If you have that experience around for that long of a time, I think it could really bode well for us.

Q. What do you expect from Megan Meyer this season?

LISA BLUDER: Megan has also improved tremendously. Her three-point shooting has been incredible, off the charts. She has really moved up in the rotations, so I'm excited about the progress that Megan has made.

Q. You mentioned Lexie. She's been here for a while. Maybe at times in her career her playing time or whatever has not gone exactly how she wanted, but with openings in that backcourt with Makenzie and Kathleen moving on, how do you see her presence and just her veteran demeanor?

LISA BLUDER: We need it. We need that veteran -- that

maturity out there on the court, especially since we are so young. Lexi has been hampered a little bit with injuries throughout her career. I just would love for her to have a pain-free senior year.

She's knocked down some big shots for us. When you think of Lexi over time, at Minnesota last year, we're down two, she knocks down a three with seconds to go, or Maryland here. She's knocked down some big shots.

I continue to look for that, but more importantly than that to me is the leadership, the maturity of knowing how to handle situations.

Q. How has Kate Martin's game evolved?

LISA BLUDER: Just more confident now. I think last year we didn't see Kate nearly at what Kate is able to do because of the knee injury her freshman year and not playing and then having to play in a brace last year. This year no brace, just plays with a lot more freedom, a lot more confidence. She's a very vocal kid. She's emotional. She's somebody we can get that energy from. She's playing tremendous -- tremendous game from last year, tremendously better.

Q. Playing three in-state schools, I see from Western Illinois's website that you're playing them. Are you in talks with anybody else?

LISA BLUDER: We're trying. We're still looking. It's not easy. And quite honestly the Big Ten was really late in deciding that we were going to play non-conference games. Everybody else had kind of been jumping on them. It's a little bit tough to find that, and if we don't, we don't. We'll play 24 this year, but 25 is the goal.

Q. We've seen it on the men's side, the success that they've had from going to 20 conference games, just kind of strengthening everybody's schedule sort of top to bottom. Do you see that as something that could stick, and what are your feelings about that?

LISA BLUDER: I don't think so. We've been kind of assured from the ADs that this is a one-year adjustment, and I think it's a smart adjustment because we want to play in the Big Ten. For health reasons, competition level, playing in the Big Ten is the best. So we're glad that we're able to play 20 this year, but we would rather go back to 18.

The recipe for our success has been the 18. Last year we had a great number, or we were going to have a really good number from the Big Ten getting at-large bids, and so I think we have a good recipe for success right now for our

conference being ranked like second best in the country, so I think we'll be okay.

Q. You mentioned Caitlin being from Iowa and wanting to wear the team name on her jersey. You're from Iowa; your assistants are from Iowa; a lot of the great players you've coached are from Iowa. Do you sense some pride in the state and of course for yourself in coaching here, and you guys helped with the derecho cleanup?

LISA BLUDER: I am so thankful that I get to be the coach here. Still, this is 21 years, I pinch myself that I get to do this, that I am the women's basketball coach at the University of Iowa. I am so proud of that. I am so thankful that I get this opportunity.

For me to have Jan and Jenny and Abby all from the state on our staff, yeah, it's special when you get to coach Iowa girls. That doesn't take anything away from the women that come from out of state. I know their commitment. They're traveling farther. But almost every one of those women when they leave our program, they always are like, I'll always be an Iowan now. Megan feels that way, Tania feels that way. It's what I hear all the time is they are so proud that they chose to come here, and they feel so proud that they played here. But, when you're an Iowan, it's special. It really is.

I joke sometimes, it's almost like a religious experience when you put on that Iowa jersey for the first time and walk out of that tunnel.

Q. Speaking of your staff, I noticed Hannah Bluder is on your staff. How did that come to be?

LISA BLUDER: Well, Ugo, our director of operations from last year, got an assistant coaching position closer to her hometown, so it was an advancement. Happy for her, but this late in the game it was a little bit hard to go out during COVID and to find a director of operations. Hannah has graduated from our sports administration program here, had all the qualifications, is working on her Master's Degree, so I'm glad to have her in this temporary role.

Q. Gabbie came out with five straight against Rutgers. Is she a little more consistent this year on the threes?

LISA BLUDER: I would say so. I would say she's definitely a little more consistent in the three-point shooting.

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