

University of Iowa Volleyball Media Conference

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Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Head Coach Vicki Brown

Hannah Clayton

Kyndra Hansen

Courtney Buzzerio

Volleyball Press Conference



thus far.

Audrey Black, heavy arm. It's a different look that we have in our gym with her. She's showing her value on the outside and the right side for us, and so we're looking forward to seeing her contribution for the season, as well.

Q. What exactly was the team able to do throughout the fall? Obviously no matches. Were you able to practice? How did everything work?

VICKI BROWN: We were able to practice. We pretty much used that fall to make up the time that we had lost in the spring. We were heading into more of our competition opportunities, so more team play when we had to shut down in the spring and so we used that team just to revisit things that we were working on with certain positions. Built that up again, and then added it into our team structure and team strategy going into the new season.

So we were able to slow things down a little bit more at the beginning, and that allowed us to rev it up a little more toward October. But we have been practicing every day. We have been having some weeks where we're able only to practice for about eight hours a week, and that's including lifting. So we built that into our plan, as well; how can we physically get these athletes back into the shape they were in in the fall semester.

We looked at ways of balancing and getting them physically ready and also team and position-specific things that will tie into us physically, mentally and strategically being ready for this season.

Q. How will your new home court be advantageous to your new program?

VICKI BROWN: Well, one, no one has played in it yet. Even for these veteran teams that we'll see in our conference, it will be the first time there, and it offers a different but yet still enough similarities for us as a home team that we might have had in Carver. It still has that arena feel but a little bit more closeness in proximity to bench and different things. With us not having fans, well, we will definitely hear our parents a lot more, that's for sure.

I believe the advantage will just be, it's new. We've been in

VICKI BROWN Opening Statement: Finally, we are here. We're at Media Day. We are counting down the days to compete against Illinois, and it's been a long time coming and it will be good to not have to reference 2019 as our last competition year.

You know, our team is on the younger side but we have done a lot of work. Through the adversity of last year it has matured us and grown our team culture and really has solidified our base. We have positioned ourselves to take things to the next level.

We are excited to see our hard work that we put into play in the fall show up on the court.

Q. Can you give us a little information on some of your freshmen and how valuable they will be to you this season?

VICKI BROWN: Yeah, so our freshmen are Bailey Ortega, who is a setter, and Audrey Black, outside right side, and Leanne Lowery is a DS libero.

So Bailey Ortega and Leanne actually came in and graduated high school early, so they were here with us in the spring of 2020. As short as that time was, it definitely gave them a head start with the team, especially in those key roles of our first contact ball control coming from Leanne as well as setting from Bailey.

Our expectations, you know, Leanne brings a really nice balance to competing for that libero position, and for our ball control overall.

Bailey is coming in as a setter. She's stepped in in a role to be running our offense and we're excited for what she's going to do and the strides that she's made with the team



there, and that definitely gives you a home-court advantage of getting used to the lights and how the air flow is a little different from Carver in comparison to Xstream Arena.

Q. How much time have you spent in there already, and how much during a typical week leading up to matches will you be in there?

VICKI BROWN: Yeah, so we should be in there two days a week before the match, but we were in there definitely a few practices during the fall, especially around the time that they were allowing -- we did the ribbon-cutting and things like those different events.

But our arena has been working with us pretty well of just getting us the time that we need in there. But you know, our practice gym in Carver allows us some kind of security, so we like to balance some time in there and also in the arena.

Q. Looking at the schedule, first of all your thoughts on, let's call them double-headers against some of these teams. And second, you open up with Illinois. For you personally does that get you extra excited these days, or not anymore?

VICKI BROWN: Fair question. You know, it's always excitement to play against the program that I was an athlete at.

But to be honest, if it was Illinois or Maryland or whomever, we're just excited to be seeing -- finally see and feel that we are about to compete this year.

The double-header creates a unique challenge but then there's some benefits, as well, and we're looking and experimenting with some things, and I don't have those results yet of just how we can reset and still play and have that balance and that reset mindset, playing the same team within 48 hours.

So it will be an interesting challenge, but volleyball has had moments where this has happened before. I know on the men's side, for example, if teams are playing in Hawaii, they play them back-to-back. So there's some resources that I've been able to tap into of what that could look like and what adjustments and some things to think about that that we normally don't have to.

Looking forward to this season, this unique season, but then feeling that the adjustment will be in our communication with our athletes and making sure they feel they are ready for the next day.

Q. Sticking on the topic of the back-to-backs, how do you feel about the team's depth, and how will that influence your strategy with substitutions and how many minutes each player gets?

VICKI BROWN: I definitely feel we have depth at just about every position. I don't think it's not necessarily going to be a minute thing but it might be a COVID thing. As you all see with previous sports, having multiple lineups, ideas of how to switch up things in your lineup and switch up positions, you have to go in every week with that mindset as a coach. Those are things that we've discussed as a staff a lot of times in the fall and we've seen trained for it, as well.

You have to be ready. Fortunately our depth is multi-positional, so we have a few players that can play a couple of different positions. So we feel pretty strong about adjusting if we need to that week based on COVID.

Q. Not playing over a calendar year, but any concerns of rust? Are you able to simulate the way the game teams in practice?

VICKI BROWN: We've been doing some things to get the rust off. We did a couple of days where we're actually playing in jerseys, but it's still different, right. Even talking to those teams that were competing in the fall and some professional teams overseas that started in the last month, it's that first game; that's why we have a preseason to get the rust off.

We're starting it with conference, but the one thing we keep pushing is let's do us. Let's focus on us because that's who we know for sure is where we need to encourage more and when we need to just continue to push forward.

So we've been going into this first week, and similar to preseason, we don't have the film that we normally would go into conference. So we've just got to make it about us and that's what we are going into with over-communicating with any staff or any adjustments and as we're going through that match.

Q. Among some of your returning players, who have you seen make the most progress during the off-season?

VICKI BROWN: Yeah, during the off-season, we really pushed for our middles to do a few more things to -- to add more things statistically for us in the block in the middle offensively.

Definitely Hannah Clayton, this will be her third year of really being a starter for our program, and so she's

definitely stepped into our expectations of what we expect her to contribute in the matches.

We are definitely seeing those numbers in practice. Our sophomore outsiders this year, we put more on their plate, having both Edina (Schmidt) and Kyndra (Hansen) play a fair amount in 2019. They are starting to show those statistical games that we have asked them to go with.

And then of course there's Courtney Buzzerio who is -- you know, we've asked a lot of Courtney from setting to digging to serving to attacking to blocking. We've pretty much asked her to do everything at a high level and just to see not only her reach those statistical goals but also add that leadership on to the court.

Really excited to see her in this season as we begin.

Q. The Big Ten is traditionally such a strong conference. What's your team capable of doing in this league, and as far as goals, how would you define success this year?

VICKI BROWN: For us, no matter what the circumstances, we always have a goal of NCAA tournament. We always fight to maintain a winning mentality, and if that's calling that tournament aspirations, then so be it. That's how we go in with a winning mentality.

But our goals are not to just get through the season. Our goal is to find the way to win every single weekend. That's what we go in with, that mindset, nothing less, and then we adjust accordingly every day.

Q. Blocking was a weakness for the team last year as a whole, and you led the team in blocks last year. How have you worked to improve that aspect of the team's game?

HANNAH CLAYTON: That's been a big focus in practice. We have been breaking that down a lot. It's been a grind for sure, really honing down that aspect of our game because that's something that can definitely bring us higher. I think just breaking it down and focusing on that, especially for the middle blockers, and talking to the pins about it, as well.

Q. Your thoughts about the new arena? You've been in there a little bit. How do you like it?

HANNAH CLAYTON: We're super excited. We love the new arena. It's going to be a really fun atmosphere to play in this season and a little more condensed. Obviously won't have fans this season but in future seasons it will be fun to have that more louder atmosphere after playing in

carver. Obviously having a new facility is all nice, just having new everything, so that will be fun to be the first ones to play there.

Q. A lot of energy about the season but no fans. How do you supply your own energy?

HANNAH CLAYTON: During practice we have to work on that obviously because we are practicing without fans, as well. So being able to have that opportunity and realize that the way we are practicing is going to be very similar to the energy in the gym when we are playing, so I think having that kind of mentality going in and being mindful of that during practice has been huge.

Q. How much anticipation is there to finally get the season going?

KYNDRA HANSEN: I mean, it started since summer, basically. We got our spring season taken away from us from COVID-19 and the girls have constantly been in communication, even if we're not allowed in the gym, just talking as a team and getting closer. We have a bunch of new freshmen. So it's been much-anticipated for sure.

Q. How do you see the new freshmen fitting up?

KYNDRA HANSEN: They are great. We love all of them. That whole class is kind of like gym rats I guess. They love being in there. Always first ones in there, last ones out. They love being in the gym, so they are all great.

Q. They mesh pretty well with what's returning?

KYNDRA HANSEN: Yes, for sure. They are great assets to the team.

Q. The schedule structure is different because of COVID, you get most of the week preparing for a team and then play them back-to-back. How will that influence the team's practice schedule and preparation?

KYNDRA HANSEN: You know, definitely watching film after that first game and then that morning practice is going to be very critical to making those small changes of what we saw the game before.

Watching film is going to be super critical to making adjustments and getting the win if it didn't happen the night before, or keeping our same strategy if we did win.

Q. What would you say are the strengths of this team?

KYNDRA HANSEN: We are really scrappy. Our defense



they like can touch every ball that comes back at us. We are really strategic in our distribution, and also our shots as hitters. You can't anticipate what's going to come over like each time.

Q. Talked to you earlier, seems like years ago, you talked about wanting to grow as a leader. Can you talk more about that, in what ways that's happened?

COURTNEY BUZZERIO: I definitely think just stepping into and realizing, like, my age, and being a junior on the team and being one of the oldest and just kind of realizing there are a lot of freshmen that are going to have to take big roles on the team for playing-wise that I can be a little mentor, be their person on the court and be able to take my position and a little bit of theirs so they are not as flustered or stressed on the court and kind of get the team camaraderie kind of cohesiveness on the court leveled out, I guess.

Q. How will the new facility benefit the program?

COURTNEY BUZZERIO: Going from 15 thousand seats in Carver to 6,000 will definitely create a better atmosphere for our program and volleyball in general. I think noise will be big and having a place to really just call our own will be really important. And exciting that it's our place and our home and that we can work to defend home court.

Q. From a competitive standpoint, what kind of an advantage can that create?

COURTNEY BUZZERIO: I think having a new gym, I think we are getting acquainted with it, I guess, as well, but knowing the ins and outs of how the ball moves in the arena, like wind factors, I guess can change. But I think energy-wise, will definitely be critical, especially now without fans. It will still feel maybe a little -- the noise will be different and maybe even replicate a little bit like Carver even with fans because it's not as a large of capacity, and also I think most people aren't used to that, especially in our conference with their big fan bases and smaller arena sizes. So I think that this season, especially, spring, will be an advantage for us.

Q. If my memory is correct, you have not played since November of 2019, but was there anything you kind of focused on or worked object during the extra-long off-season?

COURTNEY BUZZERIO: As a whole, we've been working on working through kind of the weird plays and not standard pass, set, hit kind of plays and working through the scrappiness like Kyndra was saying.

Me personally, I'm working on moving the ball around and working on different shots that I think will be important for this schedule that we have with playing teams back-to-back, and having an extra little thing I can do one night and then switch it up the next night that they didn't see the night before.

Q. Kind of along the same lines, how much excitement is there to be out there playing a match again?

COURTNEY BUZZERIO: There's a lot of excitement. Our coaches have done a great job in practice having us play a lot of six-on-six and even putting jerseys on a couple times. We did that a few times before Christmas break, and then maybe last week we played a game and wore our jerseys to kind of get used to it and not be in our jerseys for the first time on Friday and play in a full game, full set-to-five match. But I think we are all just really excited to get on the court and feel the game energy and get the flow back into volleyball and normal season.

Q. How do you have to adapt know that you're getting thrown into the toughest and most important games of the year without an out-of-conference schedule to prepare for that?

COURTNEY BUZZERIO: Yeah, that's going to be a challenge jumping right into Big Ten instead of having preseason to kind of warm up. But I think like Vicki was saying in the beginning, focusing on us and knowing this is how we play and this is how we can adjust to certain situations will be extra critical.

But I also think that just working on our adaptability and being able to make quick changes and being able to fine tune the little things from Friday night to Saturday night, and also just our team cohesiveness I think has definitely grown over the year -- almost a year and a half since we played.

We're all -- we have some experience, most of us on the court for a long time from last season, so I think that's a definite advantage. None of us or most of us are just being thrown into the fire day one. We all have each other's backs and we'll definitely work through the small weirdness of our first game and getting back into competition again.