

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

Thursday, October 7, 2021

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Illinois Fighting Illini

Women's Head Coach

Nancy Fahey



NANCY FAHEY: Good morning. We are at the right time at the right place. I wanted to give a big shout-out to the Big Ten because of this Media Day for men's and women's basketball. As a female basketball coach, this is outstanding. What a great day. We appreciate it. I wish you could have saw my players' eyes when we walked in here. I want to say thank you to you.

This is the right time. The Big Ten is at its best. Seven times ranked in the top 25, 70% of the players coming back. It's something to cover, and it's going to be great basketball.

We need you. I want to say thank you in advance, okay, for your support.

This summer was an interesting summer after the end of our COVID year. I know everybody has personal stories. I go from a basketball standpoint. I said it last week in our press conference, that for us and our team, it was time to reflect. It started with me, a personal reflection of who we wanted to be, what our vision was.

I think it's really important when something is taken away from you, a lot of the things that develop team chemistry, especially with a program that's trying to grow, you have a great appreciation for the chemistry and synergy you have to build back. That's what we did this summer.

We had a great summer. Unlike a lot of teams, we have six new players. One of my goals during the addition of our team was we needed some scoring. We as a team had a pace of top 15% in the country. We could run, but our efficiency was not where we wanted it to be at. We got three transfers, Kendall Bostic, De'Myla Brown, Sara Anastasieska. All three of them were from programs that win, programs that they were key players and programs where they scored. That was important to us.

We also have three freshmen coming in. One is Miss Minnesota, Adalia McKenzie. As we built this with the juniors and seniors, built that together, I feel like we have that chemistry in the locker room that we need. The

veterans combined with the youthful people that want to put the ball up a lot.

It's been a really good start. But I always tell our kids, everybody is excited right now, okay? It's going to be the day to day. It's going to be when we really have to go after it, when it's into December, January. Everybody can start, we have to learn to finish.

It is a special year, it's the 40th anniversary of the first Big Ten Championship Game between Ohio State and Illinois. We'll be celebrating that. We will be playing Ohio State. We recognize that.

A lot of good things, an exciting time to grow. We're in a different position. We're excited. We're focused. If you're going to be in the best league, that's where I want to be. I think the Big Ten is the best league.

Q. In your time in women's basketball, how much has changed around the sport, the attention to the sport, just the health of the sport?

NANCY FAHEY: Change is amazing. I'm standing in front of you guys right now, in an incredible facility. I was talking to somebody else today, and driving up here with my players, they're talking about the WNBA, what is this going to be really like, coach, we don't know what this is. Putting women in this situation, they get an opportunity to talk about basketball, it's created jobs, it's created a future. More importantly, what the game has given back is women an opportunity to grow in places that we just didn't really have.

When I went through school, it was, Oh, you want to be a nurse or a teacher. I don't mean to date myself, but it's changed that much. This game has really opened up doors that I wish you could all see. I wish you could be in the car ride home because I have a feeling their stories here are going to be special and they're going to bring them back.

We just inducted Jenna Smith into the Hall of Fame at Illinois. I say that because the conversations the kids have with them, developing women leaders is so vital.



Q. You said you brought in Kendall Bostic. An Indiana kid, came from Suzy's program at Michigan State. What do you see her as leading your team with? What value can she bring to Illinois?

NANCY FAHEY: Basketball and person. Person first, okay? Incredible person. Incredible family. Solid. Every day just comes in and does her job. That's first.

The basketball part is she's a stretch forward, she can hit the perimeter shot. She's been leading our team weekly in offensive boards. That tells you something right there. You can do all you want about crash, crash, crash. She just does it.

That combination is what I'm talking about, that maturity of our team. So I'm extremely excited Kendall is with us.

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