

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

Friday, October 8, 2021

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Michigan State Spartans

Women's Head Coach

Suzy Merchant



SUZY MERCHANT: Good morning. I'm excited to be here. Thank you all for being part of this amazing two-day event. I mean, this is unique, outside the box, and absolutely love what I see here. It's so much better than behind the screen at Zoom.

Kevin, to you and your entire team, Chris, everybody over there, this is amazing. I love the uniqueness of it. Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

Michigan State. So we're very excited about this team. Of course, it's October. Every coach is undefeated, so everybody is excited about their team right now.

But we were an NCAA tournament team last year. We have 84% of our scoring back. A First-Team dynamic guard in Nia Clouden, almost 19 points a game for us last year. She is really fun to watch. A much more experienced group with our top seven players back.

The Big Ten women's basketball side of things was very exciting to watch last year with seven of us in the NCAA tournament. There's many of us in the league. When we play at home, no question it is a home-court advantage. Michigan State, we're blessed to say, is one of those, as we've always been top 10, top 15 in attendance.

We're excited to bring our fans back. I do want to thank our marketing team for the cardboard cutouts. They weren't very loud, so we're looking forward to seeing and feeling the energy.

With that I will be happy to take any questions you may have.

Q. Can you talk about what Matilda brings to the team this year and the impact she's had so far.

SUZY MERCHANT: Sure. So he's referring to Matilda Ekh on our team. Last year, another fun part of COVID in the pandemic, she is from Sweden, and we could not get her out of the country. We tried everything we possibly could. But due to the COVID and the pandemic, we

certainly couldn't get her out. Again, we tried everything.

It was tough to get her here this year. She had to get her student visa from another country to come to the U.S. On top of that being a challenge, what she brings to the team, a National Team player for the Swedish team. She's been doing that since she's been 17 years old.

She's a typical European player. She can shoot it, handle it, she can be a one, two, three in our system. Technically she could be a four if needed.

Very dynamic, but very even-keeled. She experienced. Even though she's a freshman and the first time on our campus, you feel like she's a junior or senior in terms of how she plays the game. She's going to add so much to our team this year, no question.

Thank you for your question.

Q. You've never had a losing season at Michigan State. Talk about how well you recruit guards, Haynie and McCutcheon, Clouden. What makes Michigan State a place to go to if you're a point guard or a shooting guard?

SUZY MERCHANT: Yeah, I want to add Tori Jankoska to that list, and Aerial Powers was a two, three man, a little more three, four when she played.

It's important to have every position covered obviously. You can't win at a high level without everybody. But I do think dynamic guard play at Michigan State, it takes you to another level. When they can create. For us, when we go out and recruit, we have the opportunity to share with them, These are the kids that have gone to the league, won at high levels not only here but certainly in the WNBA. Aerial is a world champion. Haynie is a world champion. I think what we do translates very well to the next level. I think being able to share that with all the recruits.

We've had some high-motor, tough. Our guards, the ones we look for are gritty, tough, aggressive. They don't back down, look forward to a challenge. On top of that, you have that skill piece that obviously goes with it. I think it's



just a good connection.

I think Tom has done a good job of that with his guard at Michigan State, as well.

Q. (Indiscernible)?

SUZY MERCHANT: After the hot start, is that what you said?

Q. Yes.

SUZY MERCHANT: Well, probably the experience that we have. I'm banking that that will carry over certainly early in the season. We're going to have some road games. Certainly we have Notre Dame at home, which is going to be a great opportunity for us to test ourselves early in the season I guess.

But I got to look to Nia Clouden. At the end of the day, leaders matter and experience matters. She's 19 a game, First-Team All-Conference player. When she goes, we go. Putting the team on her back. Also with the experience we have, I expect us to do well.

I think we're further ahead right now after eight days of practice than we've been at any time really, especially on the offensive side of the ball.

Q. Have you named captains yet or is that...

SUZY MERCHANT: We haven't named captains yet. In fact, last year, due to the pandemic, we did a captain for the week just to kind of to see. There's different responsibilities they had with the team that week. I think that helped really extend some ownership to our team. It's really developed some opportunities, too. I'm not sure exactly who that is going to be. I haven't named that yet.

I definitely believe Nia Clouden will be one of those captains for us. What we're going to do beyond that, that's not something we've really put a stamp on yet.

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