

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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Rosemont, Illinois, USA

Men's Basketball Panel

Danny Sprinkle

Washington

Ben Johnson

Minnesota

Matt Painter

Purdue

THE MODERATOR: Joined by the head coaches of those team, Danny Sprinkle, Ben Johnson, and Matt Painter are with us. Danny, I want to catch up with you and how crazy life has been since you took this job. We spoke right after you took this job. You were living in a hotel and basically on the road constantly recruiting.

I think by the time we talked in the summer you and the rest of your staff had gotten kind of a frat house type deal together where you lived together and were working. Has everybody settled in now with families in town?

DANNY SPRINKLE: We have. Me, my assistants all found new places to stay. It was. We called it the frat house. We got the job. We were in the hotel for about seven days, and then a good friend of mine, Will Dissly, who played for the Seahawks and was a UW alum; now is he with the Chargers. He had his house there, so he was kind enough to let us stay there for a couple of months until we got settled. But it took about three months.

THE MODERATOR: I'm guessing you treated it a little bit better, kept it a little cleaner than the frat house on campus.

DANNY SPRINKLE: We did. There wasn't too many parties. There actually wasn't any.

THE MODERATOR: Just to be clear.

DANNY SPRINKLE: You do have Tony Bland waking up at 5:30 a.m. talking and being loud on the phone, but it was great.

THE MODERATOR: Matt, it was something of a party for you and your program. Obviously you reached the national title game. Came up one win game short of the ultimate.



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What was the offseason and the summer like for you and your guys to be able to celebrate that a little with also getting ready for this coming year?

MATT PAINTER: I think the biggest piece was just not being in the portal. For us we didn't have anybody leave to where we had to go into the portal.

After you know what people go through, especially something like Danny when you take over a job and what that entails and the time, then you have to segue through the spring portal into recruiting in the summer. You never stop. He hasn't come up for air, and that's just different than where you are when you are going into your 20th season.

Now we're able to develop. Now we're able to know the guys on our team. We're not trying to get adjusted outside of our freshmen that are brand new.

We had a great summer. Just trying to stay on edge and be better next year.

THE MODERATOR: For those that followed Purdue basketball, Big Ten basketball, college basketball as a whole, one of the great parts of that run to the Final Four was seeing Coach Katie there enjoying it. We know he had a recent health scare. What can you tell us?

MATT PAINTER: He is great. He just had a little bit -- like a mini-stroke. He popped right out of it and wanted to know who is winning the USC-Michigan football game. He had the teams right.

No, he is great. He's going to try to get by to our practice next week.

THE MODERATOR: That's great to hear. Ben, we got to watch your team take some serious steps last year. I know for you and your staff it was probably really enjoyable to be able to watch a year where you didn't have to battle through so many injuries and key guys were actually able to play the minutes that you wanted them to play. How do you assess the growth that you saw from your team last season?



BEN JOHNSON: Definitely. I think we took the necessary steps that we needed to in our third year. Not only just nonconference-wise and handling business, but also in conference by getting nine wins.

You look at the history of our program. I think since 1990 we've won ten games twice in that time period. For us to get nine last year hopefully builds confidence to our guys. Like everybody else, you want to keep the momentum going.

Now we've talked kind of a winning mentality and a winning culture, and we have to find ways to build on that.

THE MODERATOR: What are the ways to build on that?

BEN JOHNSON: I think it's viewing yourself as just that. As crazy as that sounds, every day winning habits. Like what does that look like? Now they know, and there's expectations, and we have returners that are back that went through that and knew the work that put into winning 19 games in postseason and winning 19 games in a really tough league so they can be role models for the new guys about what it takes every day to be a total winner.

THE MODERATOR: Matt, the challenge for your team is a little bit different. The challenge of following up that kind of run. What kind of conversation have you had with the guys, have the guys had amongst themselves about that challenge?

MATT PAINTER: Obviously trying to win three Big Ten championships in a row and just keep that carrot in front of us, but we have three starters back from a Final Four team. We have five freshmen. We have a lot of guys with experience outside of those three starters.

Just blending in those five freshmen more than anything. Just understanding what we do and how we do it. It takes a little bit of time. No, we're excited about it. We're excited about this group.

We also know that it's going to be very hard, and that's the one thing when you play a challenging schedule like we have, you know, in nonconference, that you have to get yourself prepared because it is such a bear when you get to Big Ten play.

THE MODERATOR: Danny, the job is still fairly new. The roster is new. The conference is new for Washington. What's the biggest challenge in getting guys ready for opening day when everything seems so new?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah, I think organizing everything in

the program getting them ready. Like they talked about, the daily habits, how we compete, how you have to compete, and the physicality of the Big Ten. You know, from the weight room to the nutrition to every single thing that you do that day impacts that first game that you are going to have to play.

So getting my staff, who a lot of them are brand new, getting them organized into how I operate and how I want our program to operate on a daily basis and then for that to trickle down to the strength coach, to the nutritionist, to the whole team is probably the most important thing.

THE MODERATOR: How do you want to set and sell the expectations to your players so they know what is expected from them from the jump?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah, we have our non-negotiables every day in practice. Me and my staff, we have to be relentless on those, from effort to energy, to being a great teammate, to being physical in every drill.

It trickles down to their real life, but that's something we have to be relentless on.

THE MODERATOR: Ben, when you look about and see Danny's team, the three other West Coast additions, obviously Dan yea has had nothing but success the places he's coached. Eric Musselman has been everywhere, Mick Cronin, Dana Altman, long-time success. How much tougher does that make a trip around this league?

BEN JOHNSON: It definitely didn't do us any favors when we added these programs, but if you are a competitor, you want to be in the best league possible. I think top to bottom we're definitely in that.

So it's getting your team to understand the urgency that you have to have now. It's going to be more of a grind probably than ever. You have a little bit of different travel now, but the excitement of adding these four programs I think heightens the competition for everybody.

We're looking forward to it.

THE MODERATOR: Matt, it's obviously a challenge but also a great opportunity as you mentioned. The potential to win three straight regular season titles. What do you think it will be like to get through this 18-game schedule when you add in the travel, you add in the new teams, and everything that basically every program not just yours is trying to figure out?

MATT PAINTER: I think more than anything you have to have enough pieces, but you also have to be a little bit



lucky. You have to stay healthy. You have to get a break. Hopefully you can make your own breaks, but you have to be able to get a break.

Right now the way the schedule goes, like, we all look at it, and there's a grind somewhere to where you are playing five or six games in 17 days or something crazy where you don't have a day off.

We have a stretch for two and a half weeks where we don't have a day off in the Big Ten play. How do we come out of that? When you look at it, you are, like, do you split that? Do you win it all? Do you lose them all? You really don't know. You have mixed feelings.

But when you look at the media and how they rank people and how they look at people, like, I don't know how you would go about it with so much change from the portal to a new job to add in the four teams. It's just a crap shoot. It's good that people pick you to win your league, but it really means nothing.

If you are there in the first week of March, then it does mean something.

THE MODERATOR: I know something that means a lot for you is to have Braden Smith back. He is your preseason player of the year. Fletcher as well in the back court. There's a lot of talk with Zach gone, what will you do? I know you have a couple of big guys, but it's not as though you haven't been more perimeter-based in the past. Carson Edwards had a good run a few years ago. How different do you like stylistically?

MATT PAINTER: He's always had the ball in his hands, even when Zach was there. When we play out of the post, we play through ball screens and post up a lot. He can really manipulate the defense with his ability to see the court and to be able to pass and to make plays and make shots, but he is also someone who defers to others at times. We need him just to be more aggressive.

Fletcher Loyer, same thing. Just a winner. Know how to play. Tough. Hard-nosed. Makes shots. They will have more of a responsibility.

Then I think Trey Kaufman will really step in to where he will be one of the best big guys in our league.

THE MODERATOR: Ben, the players that are here with you will be huge for you this year. They're energy guys. They're mismatched guys in Dawson's case as well. What do you need from those two guys specifically this year in terms of both leadership and production?

BEN JOHNSON: I think consistency is the big thing, and that's day in and day out. I think obviously a guy like Dawson that's got all the accolades, that's been through it, can you elevate everybody else's play to your level and your standards, and that starts with practice.

Then also can you be a coach in the locker room? We have a bunch of new guys. Can you explain and tell them what this grind is like? Parker Fox, a guy that came on the scene after not playing for two years, had a really good first year back. Can you counter that? Can you be a little bit better?

Then I thought Mike Mitchell, a guy that came in and was really productive, you look across the board with just his numbers. He can really shoot it. Where can you take it? Can you be greedy? Can you take another step?

All those guys have been in our system, and so the leadership standpoint and getting those guys to get everybody else on board and just understand the urgency that you have to have, if you want to give yourself every single day.

THE MODERATOR: Folks that watched Parker for a second are blown away about the spark that he brings. Is his skill set, though, maybe underrated?

BEN JOHNSON: I think it is. He's a guy, he's such a thinker. He really keeps our offense moving. When we're in our flow game, he is a guy that is just -- the music doesn't stop. He is able to get the ball to a second and third side. That becomes contagious. Just his IQ, his feel. He is crafty. He is also obviously very athletic, and he plays with a ton of energy. I do think his skill set is a little undervalued, but it's something that we know really helps us especially offensively.

Then just the urgency that he has. You know, I think he is seventh year now. You have been around it. He knows this is his last go-around, and that was one thing we tried to do in the portal. You can find a bunch of guys where this is their last go-around. The urgency is there every day.

It creates a competitive environment.

THE MODERATOR: I love it. Seventh year. Today's day and age of college sports, right. Danny, the transfer portal, necessity for you coming into a new program. Great Osobor is a guy you know well. Others maybe that you got out of the transfer portal that can help are who?

DANNY SPRINKLE: I think Tyler Harris, a transfer from University of Portland. He is a 6'8" wing. He can really

score the basketball. He can score it. He can shoot it. He can drive it. He just is a mismatch with his size.

Another kid Mekhi Mason from Rice, who is a very talented offensive player, who we're going to need to be really good.

Then another kid that's been hurt the last two years that Washington, Frank Kepnang. Big 6'11", shot-blocking big. He's really worked on his offensive game. He didn't practice all summer, but he's really getting rolling now, and I think those three can really help us.

THE MODERATOR: Let's finish here. As you do get rolling here and get into practice full-time, get the guys really going, what's Washington's biggest focus before opening night?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Being physical and playing together. When you bring 13 pretty much brand new players together, everybody is trying to show how good they are, especially the transfers. Now they got to start playing together. They have to play for one another. They have to get teammates a shot, and they have to understand it's not about them.

If we want to be successful, we're going to need all 13 of those guys because you need depth in the Big Ten.

THE MODERATOR: Ben, what will be your biggest priorities?

BEN JOHNSON: Same thing. Getting everybody on the same page. Offensively, defensively, understanding your system. Getting guys comfortable kind of developing roles and then hopefully through competition and people start separating themselves a little bit.

THE MODERATOR: Matt.

MATT PAINTER: For us about the same thing. Just in terms of we have five freshmen, so it's a little bit different. Just kind of blending those guys in and the roles that were mentioned are so important. It's the pillars of basketball. Take care of the basketball and rebound. You can go through and talk about a lot of different things, but if you are great at those two things, you are going to be pretty successful.

THE MODERATOR: Really appreciate the time here.

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