

# Big Ten Basketball Media Days

Tuesday, October 11, 2022

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

## Big Ten

Commissioner Press Conference

## Big Ten Conference

## Commissioner Kevin

## Warren

KEVIN WARREN: Good morning. It truly is a pleasure to stand before you here today in the great state of Minnesota, the great city of Minneapolis, and really to be able to reflect upon the progress that we've been able to make this past year as we really focus on fortifying and building the strength of Big Ten men's and women's basketball.

Last year was a big step when, for the first time in conference history, we actually hosted all 28 teams in our Big Ten Conference, both men and women, at our Basketball Media Days to just show how important gender equity, gender equality was for us.

I'm blessed to stand before you here today and to be able to have that same event occur here in Minneapolis.

I want to take a moment to thank all of our student-athletes, first and foremost, for their dedication, their sacrifice, their commitment to excellence, their desire to be great in the classroom, on the court, and in the community.

As we all know, although our student-athletes are our focal point, there are so many people who put in a lot of time, energy on a daily basis to make sure they have an opportunity to be great. That's their parents, their family, our coaches, our athletic directors, our senior women administrators, faculty representatives, chancellors and presidents, all the medical personnel, all the academic personnel on campus that work hard to help build an incredible tradition of Big Ten Conference basketball for both our women and our men student-athletes.

I want to take a moment to thank our Big Ten staff. They've worked tirelessly to make this event happen today. I was actually walking in the hotel this morning a little after 6:30, and I saw one of our staff members, backpack on, arms full, carrying documents, carrying food over here to



the Target Center to make sure that today goes smoothly. It's that commitment that makes our staff incredibly special.

Another special thank you goes to our media partners, who will air Big Ten basketball this year, in FOX, FS1, in CBS, in ESPN, and Big Ten Network.

When thinking about Big Ten Network, I want to thank them who are here today who are bringing this press conference today and tomorrow to all of our fans, literally around the world, under their esteemed leadership of their president, Francois McGillicuddy, who is not only a friend, but a partner and great leader for our Big Ten network.

Thank you for all they do to bring all of this content, not only on Big Ten Network, but BTN Plus to our many fans who love Big Ten basketball.

A special thank you goes to the Minnesota Sports Commission who have been a great partner. We're looking forward to bringing our women's basketball tournament here this season and then next season our men's and women's basketball tournament.

Also I want to thank Mayor Jacob Frey, a partner of the Big Ten Conference. I know he'll be here sometime over the next two days.

One partner near and dear to the Big Ten Conference, and I want to thank Tyler Cooper for solidifying this relationship, and that's TIAA for being named the official partner of Big Ten Conference Basketball Media Days, which is a first ever, and also an incredible partner for our Big Ten men's and women's basketball tournaments.

From an administrative standpoint, I saw him earlier, but he may be somewhere working, I want to announce that we have hired Brad Taylor as our new vice president of men's basketball at the Big Ten Conference. Brad is here today.

Brad, welcome to the Big Ten family. We welcome you and your family here.

Brad has had an esteemed career at the NCAA, but also for many of our NCAA member institutions. Brad literally



joins us today. We look so forward to having him here to lead our Big Ten men's basketball efforts. He has incredible integrity, he works hard, loves our student-athletes, loves our coaches.

Most of all he'll be a dedicated member to the Big Ten Conference. Thank you for the commitment to excellence, and we look forward to working with you.

Next to Brad, who we introduced last year, is Megan Kahn, who has been an incredible addition to the Big Ten Conference. Megan is our vice president of women's basketball. She did things last year to help fortify our conference, which I'm so grateful for that. To have Brad and Megan, to see them standing there together is really special. It puts us in a position as far as where we want to go to make sure we remain the strongest basketball conference in the world.

As a thank you to my wife, Greta, who has been a partner, an ally, a great businesswoman, the leader of our family. She'll be here tomorrow. She's done a fantastic job of raising our two children, Peri and Powers.

I just want to tell Greta how much I love and appreciate her. She lost her father, my father-in-law, last week, who was special not only to me but to Greta. I just want to let her know that I'm thinking about her today, and I look forward to having her join us here tomorrow.

I personally know, as a former collegiate basketball student-athlete, what a coach can mean to you, how it can change your life. I think back to all of the coaches in my life, from elementary school, to high school, to college, who took the time, energy and effort to mold me into the person that I am today.

I know what our coaches do on a daily basis for our student-athletes. They lead with integrity and honor and discipline and commitment to excellence and grit. I want to tell our coaches, I tell them all the time, but I want to tell them publicly how much I respect them, how much I admire them, how much I appreciate what they do on a daily basis, and how grateful I am for all of our 28 head basketball coaches on men and women in the Big Ten Conference, all the assistant coaches, and our student-athletes.

They're phenomenal students, they're phenomenal athletes, stewards in the community. They're leaders. It's an honor and pleasure to be able to serve our basketball coaches and our basketball student-athletes.

As you can tell, the Big Ten Conference is focused on being innovative, creative, strong, bold, powerful. We will

never be complacent. We will never follow the status quo. But we also will embrace our 127-plus year history that has gotten us to the point where we are today.

But today I want to make sure that we discuss how we're going to continue to build our conference from a men's and women's basketball standpoint.

We will do what it takes when the time is right to provide opportunities and equity well beyond the playing court for our student-athletes and our fans. We want to make sure that all of the decisions we make are tethered to education, that we remember that our student-athletes are on our campuses to earn a qualified degree, to work hard in the classrooms, to be great athletes.

And if they're so blessed to play in the Olympics, the National Basketball Association, the WNBA, God bless them. But what will last them for the remainder of their days on earth is an education, a degree, from one of our incredible institutions. We need to make sure that we keep that first and foremost.

So because of that, our priority has to make sure that we ensure growth, sustainability and strength for our student-athletes and our member institutions.

We are currently working on building our student-athlete advisory commission. We'll be starting to finalize that here in the next few weeks, have meetings before the end of the year, so we can continually hear and learn from our student-athletes what's important to them, what we can do better as a conference, how we can come together to make their experience even more special than it already is.

You know gender equality and equity is a focus at the Big Ten Conference. What we're doing to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Title IX. What we did with our recent women's leadership symposium at our conference office. What we've done with Big Ten Volleyball Media Days. What we're doing here today to say both our women and men basketball, coaches and student-athletes, have earned the right to be on the same stage at the same time, not in separate locations, that we respect them at the same level.

We want to build opportunities for them in the classroom, in the community. You saw it this summer, many of you here today got a chance to experience what it means to build immersive experiences in the community with our Big Life Series that occurred in Selma and Montgomery, Alabama.

When I looked as we walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, saw many of our student-athletes here today, to be able to feel what happened on Bloody Sunday, to be able

to feel what it means to be an American, to be able to feel how the civil rights movement was important, my heart was warmed.

We will continue to have those Big Life Series events like we had last summer in Selma, Alabama. I'm grateful of our commitment to excellence with our coaches, our student-athletes, and our administrators.

As you're aware, we are building the Big Ten Conference into the strongest brand in all of college athletics. We now are coast-to-coast, from New Jersey, and in 2024, all the way to Los Angeles. We are very, very pleased and grateful, we're blessed every day, for our 14 member institutions who comprise the Big Ten Conference.

We also are extremely excited about our two new family members who are scheduled to join our conference in the fall of 2024: the University of California, Los Angeles and the University of Southern California, two outstanding academic and athletic institutions with rich history, tradition and legacy.

The leaders at UCLA -- Chancellor Gene Block and their athletic director, Martin Jarmond; and at USC, President Carol Folt and their athletic director, Mike Bohn -- are great partners.

One of our key focus points this year is to make sure that we flawlessly integrate both UCLA and USC into the Big Ten Conference. Our student-athletes have been our number one priority, and during this integration period, they will continue to be our number one priority. You'll be able to see it in how we schedule, how we handle multi-team events, the experiences they will be able to have by now being able to travel to play different institutions across the country.

We'll ask ourselves: What can we do on a daily basis to strengthen this academic opportunity, to strengthen these athletic opportunities? How will this relationship and expansion create new opportunities for our student-athletes to broaden their platform both on and off the court?

We think of the many future student-athletes, the thousands of student-athletes in the future, who will call themselves Big Ten student-athletes.

So with that we will methodically, strategically position the Big Ten Conference not only for success now but for success 100, 200, 300, 400 years from now as we build a much stronger conference.

We are also building a unique conference with the

opportunities with our upcoming media rights agreements which take place starting next fall, the fall of '23. Our world-class media partners will be able to provide a platform for our student-athletes to display their skills, for our fans to be able to consume content around the world in any form or fashion they so desire via the Big Ten Network, BTN Plus, FOX, FS1, NBC, CBS, and NBC Peacock.

We have strong linear network partners, and we also have a strong direct-to-consumer partner. We want to make sure that we provide the flexibility to our fans to be able to consume content in the manner in which they desire.

Our new media rights agreements are the most complex and comprehensive set of media rights agreements in all of college athletics. It will further strengthen the tradition of the Big Ten Conference.

As you heard me say before, the goal is to make sure we provide content to our fans from age 5 to 105 in any manner or form that they such desire to consume that content.

As you all know, anytime you can enter into these level of complex arrangements, it takes so many talented people. We had leadership at our chancellor's and president's level, we had leadership in our athletic director level, we had leadership with our FARs and SWAs, and then there were individuals in our conference office who literally worked around the clock, who sacrificed family time, vacations, probably their health to an extent, to be able to get these deals done to make sure that we bring the best possible, most progressive media agreements ever done before.

I see a few of them here today: Laura Anderson, who is our chief financial officer; Kerry Kenny, who is an incredible partner in building these media agreements; and Anil Gollahalli; and Diana Sabau; Adam Neuman, who is not here today. He'll be here tomorrow; he's observing a Jewish holiday today. Carrie Cecil.

There's so many people here that sacrificed to make sure that when we announced those media agreements, that our fans would be appreciative, but most of all that our student-athletes and our coaches would have an opportunity to be able to perform on platforms that had never been done before.

Today we're here to focus on Big Ten's women's and men's basketball. I'm so proud of our student-athletes and coaches. Last year was incredible. We had six of our women's teams who are blessed to get a berth to the NCAA tournament, four teams advanced to the Sweet 16, we had four women student-athletes drafted in the WNBA.



On the men's side we had nine teams make the tournament, which tied a conference record. We had nine of our student-athletes drafted, four in the first round, three lottery picks.

Not only do we have phenomenal student-athletes, we have phenomenal coaches. Last year many of our coaches were able to reach milestones.

Lisa Bluder, our women's basketball coach at Iowa, recorded her 800th win.

Joe McKeown, our women's basketball coach at Northwestern, recorded his 750th win.

Suzy Merchant, who's our women's basketball coach at Michigan State, recorded her 500th win.

Teri Moren, our women basketball coach at Indiana, recorded her 350th win.

Matt Painter, who's our head basketball coach at Purdue, recorded his 400th win.

Tom Izzo, our iconic leader at Michigan State University, became the winningest coach in Big Ten basketball history.

Congratulations to all of our former student-athletes who were drafted and to the professional ranks, our coaches, who reached certain milestones.

We have so many of our First Team All-Big Ten men's and women's basketball players back this year. It's going to be an exciting year.

As I close here, again with our student-athletes, coaches, our athletic directors, chancellors and president, senior women administrators, faculty representatives, our professors, all the doctors, all the support staff, academic support staff, the family members, parents, siblings, coaches, and our fans, I just want to thank you and to let you know you have my word that we're going to do everything possible at the Big Ten Conference to build this conference, to make us the strongest basketball conference ever, to place teams in Final Fours, to win national championships.

And at the conference level we will do everything we possibly can to make sure that that happens in an honorable and ethical, professional manner.

So thank you for being here today. Thank you for your commitment to telling the stories of Big Ten basketball. I'm so excited about this season, and I look forward to seeing

many of you during our journey throughout the season as we make a push toward the Final Four and the crowning of a national championship on both the women's and the men's side.

So with that, I'll open it up for some questions. Again, thank you for your time, commitment to excellence, and your energy in being here today.

**Q. What is the Big Ten's approach to expansion moving forward? Do you want to add programs? If you do, what are you looking for?**

KEVIN WARREN: The biggest thing right now and what we have come up with, what we're calling some of our can't miss priorities. One of them is to make sure we flawlessly integrate our new media partners, but the other one is to make sure we flawlessly integrate USC and UCLA into the Big Ten Conference.

In the climate we're in right now in college athletics, you also have to be mindful of expansion. But our priority is just to make sure that we take care of our 14 member institutions now from a basketball standpoint, from a conference standpoint, and that we do everything that we possibly can to make sure we flawlessly integrate UCLA and USC.

We have a lot of work to do. It's one thing to negotiate contracts, to make an announcement, but it's another thing to actually get the work done. That's what we're focused on right now.

**Q. The Pac-12 recently announced a legacy series with the SWAC, doing men's and women's basketball beyond the current format this season. Would the Big Ten think about doing something similar connecting with a black college? And then if you want to speak any longer about what happened this summer going across the bridge, your experience.**

KEVIN WARREN: We've had some discussions about seeing what we can do to create some of these legacy series games. I know we've had some one-off games that have been played.

But from a long-term standpoint, that's the beautiful thing about having UCLA and USC join us, there are some things we are working on now to continually afford our student-athletes the opportunity to play against Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

I look forward as we bring that to life as far as what we could do from a scheduling standpoint. That's part of the many things on the table as we're looking through



scheduling and expansion, what we can do from a unique standpoint.

It fits hand and hand, as your second part of your question alluded to, with our dedication and commitment to equality.

This summer was emotional. It was magical. I think about the Selma trip every single day. I thought about it when we rode the bus from Montgomery to Selma, a 54-mile bus ride.

One of the things I challenged myself and individuals on the trip: What would you walk 54 miles for? Our civil rights leaders walked, they made that five-day, 54-mile walk.

What's interesting about it, they just walked for the opportunity to vote. When you think of the commitment. They weren't on a bus. They were walking. So when we were able to make that walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, see all the footage of what happened on Bloody Sunday, to think of the many sacrifices that individuals made, it makes days like today incredibly special for us to be able to tell those stories.

One thing that we'll continually do is to be able to tell those stories about civil rights in our country but tell it through the mold and the medium of basketball, especially basketball in the Big Ten Conference.

I look forward to working with Kerry Kenny and others, athletic directors in our conference, to be able to tell those stories, create these unique opportunities for our student-athletes that they'll be talking about for the remainder of their lives.

Thank you for those questions.

**Q. With the women's tournament coming here next spring on the heels of a successful Final Four here last spring, can you talk about your view of this market as a market that supports women's basketball in particular.**

KEVIN WARREN: Thank you for that question.

I mean, I'm excited to be able to bring our Media Days here for the first time, and our tournaments here. Minnesota, Minneapolis, St. Paul, the Twin Cities, this entire region is basketball hungry.

I was fortunate to live here for 16 years, with my time at the Vikings. All the way from high school basketball to college basketball, I think of the many games I was able to enjoy watching here, the history and tradition.

I think people are going to be really excited, and probably somewhat surprised, about how basketball is supported here in the Twin Cities. I was fortunate to come to the Final Four here last year. You saw the crowds. They were passionate. They love basketball here.

One of the things that's been exciting is for us to be able to move our Media Days around -- we were in Indianapolis last year -- and our tournaments around. We'll have the men's tournament in Chicago this year due to the COVID swap we had to make, coming back here next year for women's and men's basketball.

This is a great basketball environment. I think people will be really pleasantly surprised as far as the way they embrace basketball here, but also the hospitality of putting on great big events.

When you look down the road of adding USC and UCLA to our basketball standpoint, it's really exciting of the kind of talent that we'll have here going forward.

I'm excited about being able to come back to the Twin Cities, to be able to watch some great basketball right here in this venue.

**Q. When UCLA and USC join, how, if at all, the basketball tournaments, the season-ending tournaments would look any different? Where are you with football alignment? I'm guessing you don't know what you're doing, but what kind of stuff is on the table there?**

KEVIN WARREN: Regarding the basketball tournaments, quite naturally we have to look at how that works. We have individuals in our organization now who are working with those potential tournaments will look like.

I know one thing, they'll be exciting. Now we have the flexibility to have them really anywhere across the country. So having two great basketball programs, the history and tradition.

You think about some of the great basketball players, both men and women, who have played at UCLA, probably the greatest coach of all time in Coach Wooden, Cheryl Miller and so many other athletes who have played there, it's going to be good to have that history and tradition.

We'll look at ways to build that with our new family members in UCLA and USC, from a location standpoint.

I think your question is about divisions, if we'll continue to have them in football. We're having meetings on that right now. The good thing about it we're in this what we're

calling an integration phase. We have members of our organization -- Kerry Kenny is leading one group, Diana Sabau, Chad Hawley, Anil Gollahalli -- are working on integration. We're being very thoughtful.

As I mentioned earlier, we're going to keep the health, safety of our student-athletes at the forefront of all of our decisions, but also provide our student-athletes with the excitement to be able to play some great teams.

I can't tell you the number of coaches who are excited from a recruiting standpoint and student-athletes who have thanked me personally now to be able to play these games and these tournaments within our conference with great institutions.

As I said, Cheryl Miller, Lisa Leslie, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, John Wooden, Jackie Robinson, when you think of Jackie Joyner-Kersey, all these great athletes who have come out of USC and UCLA, from an athletic standpoint, and then what they've done academically.

What we're going to make sure that we do on our road trips is to tie in the academic component with our faculty athletic representatives to provide our student-athletes with an opportunity to learn like they've never learned before. With our Academic Alliance that we have, it's going to be critically important for us to be able to do it.

We're excited about these different road trips. We're excited about working with our provosts and everyone on campus to afford our student-athletes an opportunity to learn.

We've had discussion on these trips, like with Selma, that we did. How can that become a course? Regardless of what course a student-athlete has taken in civil rights, that trip right there, I can tell you right now, was life-changing. We have some great plans in order to make sure that we build this relationship athletically and academically with our student-athletes.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Commissioner.

KEVIN WARREN: Thank you. Thank you very much.

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