

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

Tuesday, October 11, 2022

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Rutgers Scarlet Knights

Men's Head Coach

Steve Pikiell



KEVIN WARREN: Next to the podium is our head basketball coach at Rutgers University, Steve Pikiell, who just leads with integrity and honor and grit and hard work. Always has tough basketball teams. Chris Corso, who works with him, worked many years at the Vikings, thinks the world of him. I'm glad of what Coach has done in the area of combating paralysis for the Eric LeGrand Foundation and also Christopher Reeve Foundation. I know they have a game they organize that has all the proceeds that goes to those two organizations.

Coach had two back-to-back NCAA tournaments. I know he's excited about his team. I'm looking forward to seeing them play at the RAC, which is now Jersey Mike's Arena.

Welcome to the stage an outstanding coach in the Big Ten, head coach at Rutgers University, Steve Pikiell.

STEVE PIKIELL: Good morning. It's good to see everybody.

I first want to congratulate Coquese Washington. We hit a home run. Our women's coach is following a Hall of Famer, and she's going to do an unbelievable job. Glad she was here before me.

I also want to welcome Coach Willard to the league, a New Jersey guy, did a great job at Seton Hall. I want to congratulate him on that.

I also want to welcome UCLA and USC who will be joining us next year. Congratulations to those institutions.

I'm honored to be here. This is year seven for us at Rutgers University. I work for a great president and an athletic director and a huge fan base. I'm excited about our team this year. I love our leadership that we have. We have a really nice blend of veteran players and of rookies and new talent. We have one player from the transfer portal. We did not lose a player in the transfer portal, so I'm proud of that. I'm excited about returning 64% of our minutes from last year. I really believe that we have a chance to be really, really good in what is the best league

in the country, and even going to get better moving forward.

I have three representatives here today. I couldn't be more proud. Paul has only played in NCAA tournaments since he arrived. He'll be our point guard. He led the league in assists last year.

Caleb McConnell returns. He's the Defensive Player of the Year. I think he has a chance to be the national Defensive Player of the Year.

And Cliff, on his birthday today, real proud of him and his development. He's one of the best dunkers in the country, but he's a better person and basketball player. He keeps improving every day. I think he's going to have a special year for us.

The three of 'em, great students, great representatives of our university. Paul graduated. Caleb, too. Cliff is on his way. So real proud of those three guys and the guys that are back home watching. I know they're working hard getting ready for what's going to be an exciting season in the most exciting arena, Jersey Mike's. We expect a sellout every game this year. We're excited about the environment those guys have helped create at our university.

With that being said, questions.

Q. You just talked about the returnees, what you feel. To expand upon that, for Rutgers basketball, the goal this year is to make a third consecutive NCAA tournament. That's history at stake. How much do you feel the winning of the recent years, what you've built inside your facility?

STEVE PIKIELL: Well, I will tell you there's an environment there, our students, our players obviously have helped create that. They line up now. They come to games, the Riot Squad. We have an unbelievable environment. I'm thankful for our fan base, great state New Jersey. I think they really like our guys and respect how they play. They play with a little Jersey grit and excitement and enthusiasm. They've been there. They've been there.



Caleb has helped grow the program from when we weren't in the NCAA tournament, now to have the opportunity to go three straight times, which has never been done in school history. If you want to tack on the COVID year, that was a year we were going, too.

We're doing some new things with Rutgers basketball. It's a credit to the players. I also got to tell you, I have an unbelievable staff, and they've all come back: Brandin Knight, Karl Hobbs, T.J. Thompson, Mike Larkin, Steve Hayn.

I've got a really good staff. That's part of it. You keep your players, you keep your staff. They understand the culture. They understand what you're trying to do. They understand the goals that we're trying to set for our program that have never happened before.

It's a grind, but it's an exciting grind in a league like this. I'm just thankful we got a lot of support back at home.

Q. Between name, image and likeness and the transfer portal, what do you think will have the greatest long-term impact on college basketball?

STEVE PIKIELL: Well, I mean, I think obviously they're both huge issues. I think everyone is trying to navigate all of them.

I love the fact that student-athletes have a lot of choices. I think they're both certainly going to impact where college sports is headed in the future.

I don't have the answer for that. I just try to recruit great kids and try to give them every resource and opportunity they can to better themselves and their lives, try to keep them on our campus.

We were blessed this year not to have anybody in the portal. It's not an easy task because everyone wants to play and you only have so many minutes to.

Those are certainly big challenges. I don't know which one is bigger than the other. Both coming at the same time certainly poses big problems for us.

Q. What makes the RAC so special?

STEVE PIKIELL: I mean, just the energy in the building. It starts way before the game. It starts leading up to the game, the days before.

It's a fan base that's been very loyal, very passionate. Now we've added the elements of the great college students

and their creativity, their youth and their enthusiasm.

Jersey Mike's is one of the toughest places I think to play. We love it. Unbelievable home-court advantage there. Keeping these guys around keeps it that way, too.

You've got to have good players. Basketball is about having good kids that are willing to sacrifice. We've talked a lot about that this year. They have to sacrifice minutes, their offense for defense, rebounds for points, those kind of things.

I think our fans sacrifice. I think our players do. That has created, like, a great environment for us.

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