

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

Tuesday, October 11, 2022

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Northwestern Wildcats

Men's Head Coach

Chris Collins



KEVIN WARREN: Next to the podium will be the head basketball coach at Northwestern University, Chris Collins, who has been there for 10 years already at Northwestern.

Chris and his family and I have over a 40-year relationship all the ways back to our freshman year at the University of Pennsylvania where his dad, Doug, was an instrumental player for the Sixers, but also instrumental in my life as a coach and mentor.

Chris has been very actively involved in Coaches Versus Cancer. And under the leadership of Derrick Gragg, who I've seen her today, I know Northwestern will be up on the swing. Looking forward to seeing them play this year.

Welcome to the podium the head basketball coach at Northwestern University, Chris Collins.

CHRIS COLLINS: Thank you, Commissioner Warren. Always exciting to kind of get started with the season with the Media Day today. I always hate following Coach McKeown. I tell him he's a tough act to follow. Been having to do it my whole tenure at Northwestern.

Like I said, just really excited to get started with the season. It's always good. It's a fresh start each year. Really looking forward to seeing what our group can become.

We have five of our top seven guys scorers back from last year, a number of veteran players. Three guys here today -- Boo Buie, Robbie Beran, Chase Audige -- that have been three- and four-year starters in our program, have played in a lot of games, experienced some ups and downs along the way. We're going to really lean on those guys, their experience, their leadership with our group, as we build our team.

We feel like we're going to have a chance to be very competitive this year. Certainly the league is going to be as good as ever. I know there will be a lot of new faces to this league. When you compete against the level of coaches and environments that you play in, you know night

in and night out you're going to be competing against the very best.

Anxious to get started, a couple weeks away. Looking forward to seeing what our group can become.

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

CHRIS COLLINS: Yeah, I think obviously our game has changed a lot in the last couple years. I think the combination of those two things, the rules with transferring kind of changing, which has opened up more movement than we've ever seen before, now with the player's ability to make money off their name, image and likeness, which I fully support, but that has added a new dynamic to our game.

I think it's going to be interesting to see how it evolves. I think the teams and the programs that are going to be the most successful are going to be the ones that can adapt and learn how to manage what's going on in our sport.

We'd all love to see the four-year guy, the guy you come in and develop, watch him grow, mentor. We're seeing less and less of that. You're seeing more transferring. You're seeing guys bob around a little bit more. That's the reality. Every team up here, you probably have some guys they lost and some guys they gained. Us included.

It really makes the importance for you to kind of understand your identity as a program and kind of find your philosophy, what it's going to be, how can we be successful, how can we support our players.

At the end of the day the college model is still about the players. It's about these guys. It's about their development, their ability now to go out and have their own brands, make some money off what they do out there on the court.

I think it's going to be interesting. I think time will tell. I think it's still really new. We're in the first kind of year or



two of this thing. How will this evolve, what will it evolve into, what will the next steps be as we move forward.

Q. I think last year at the end of the season you talked about the continued upward trajectory. What are the factors this year with a new front court?

CHRIS COLLINS: Obviously we wanted that trajectory basketball a little bit quicker. Last year we were disappointed because we felt like we had 11 losses by five points or less during the year. You win five or six of those, all of a sudden 15 wins is 20 or 21, and you are playing in the tournament. That's kind of the margin for error.

We are going to have a younger front court. I'm anxious to see what those guys can do. A lot of new faces that are going to get opportunity. That's kind of what college basketball is about really. There are a lot of teams in this league that have lost guys that have been mainstays. It's opportunity for other guys to step up.

Certainly we're going to need those guys to do their part.

But we're going to go as our perimeter goes. I mean, that's where the strength of our team lies. Boo Buie being a four-year starter at point guard. For us to be the time we need to be, we need him to be an All-Conference-caliber performer, which I think he can be. I think his growth over the last four years has been really good. Now it's time for him to put it all together and have a great senior year.

Robbie Beran and Chase Audige have been guys that have played a lot of games, certainly have had their tough moments, but also some really good wins, have seen what it's like to win at this level.

We're going to really go as those guys can lead us. We're going to need our new front court guys to be able to come in and do their part, especially in the Big Ten. You know how physical this league is, what big guys you're going to face night in, night out. No one is going to really replace the things that Pete and Ryan did, but can collectively can we come out and can they play to their strengths and give us the production we need to be successful in the conference.

Q. We've heard a couple of coaches say it's really hard to figure out your league at this stage of the year because when you lose 80% of what you've had, you have new experience, there's a level of variance there. When you're looking around the league, how do you go about that? How do you identify what exactly a team is going to be like?

CHRIS COLLINS: Yeah, I think really the last couple years

we had a lot of continuity in our conference. That's what made the league so good. We had a tremendous amount of older talent that kind of had their styles and you knew what teams were going to do, you knew who the best players were.

I think this year is going to be a new age of Big Ten basketball. I think a number of the All-Conference players from last year have now moved onto the professional ranks. I think you're going to see a lot of emerging stars in this conference, which is going to be very exciting. I think you're going to see younger guys now, guys who have gotten better.

You saw it in the past. Who would have thought before this year last year that the kind of year Keegan Murray and Johnny Davis, the growth that they had to become the superstars they were. Those are just two examples.

I think the great unknown about a lot of these teams in this league is what's going to be exciting. Are teams playing any differently, new identities to this team, who are going to be the new stars of this conference that are going to emerge.

I think to your point, this year there are going to be a lot of intriguing story lines. We feel like with a lot of guys being back, hopefully that can be an advantage for us. We have four returning starters. We have five of our top scorers back. We feel like hopefully our experience and continuity maybe can be a little bit of an advantage for us as we get started for the season.

Q. Coach K retires. What does the sport lose without a leader like that?

CHRIS COLLINS: Coach K to me was the epitome of college basketball. I was very fortunate in my life to play for him, but then to work under him for 13 years. 17 years of my life I got to be around him every day and witness his greatness.

I think the thing more than anything is how much he loved the college game. He wanted to win, he wanted to compete, but he always wanted the game to grow. He wanted the product to be better.

Leaders and mentors like that, when you see them now leave the game, it's sad. It's surreal for me as the season is beginning not to turn on a game and not see him out there because I know his passion for it, how much he loved what he did.

We're going to miss him. It's the responsibility of us now as coaches to kind of carry that mantle of the guys before

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

us that were such unbelievable representation of the college game, the way they did it, how they led young men. I think we hold that responsibility to keep it going.

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