

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

Wednesday, October 12, 2022

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Wisconsin Badgers

Men's Head Coach

Greg Gard



KEVIN WARREN: The next coach to the podium will be Greg Gard, who is the head basketball coach at the University of Wisconsin. Greg and his wife, Michelle, founded Guarding Against Cancer, which is an initiative that raises money for cancer research. They've done a powerful job of helping those who are dealing with the unfortunate disease of cancer. They've raised more than \$6.5 million so far.

We are so happy that he's in the Big Ten Conference. We welcome to the stage the head basketball coach at the University of Wisconsin, Greg Gard.

GREG GARD: Thank you, Commissioner.

Again, on behalf of our staff and our team, this is actually season 125 for the University of Wisconsin men's basketball program. There's a lot of history, a lot of tradition, and I think most importantly the success of our student-athletes and how that has grown over the years.

Obviously we got almost two weeks of practice in. We're coming off a trip to France in August that actually the Big Ten Network chronicled, has released one of the episodes so far on "The B1G Trip," it's called. They did a phenomenal job.

I think that trip really helped get our feet on the ground and get us going into this fall. Obviously we lost three really impactful players: Big Ten Player of the Year Johnny Davis; Brad Davison, who was a phenomenal leader for us; then Chris Vogt, who was a fifth-year grad transfer.

A lot of new faces that are either new to the program or have maybe been waiting in the wings for their turn to step to this moment.

Prepared for it. Are excited to continue to build on what the tradition has been at Wisconsin. Also cement their own legacy and step into big shoes that have been put in place by guys that have come before them.

We're excited to obviously be back here in Minneapolis, be

here in Minneapolis. I know our student-athletes, the three that I have here with us, will represent us really well as Chucky Hepburn, Tyler Wahl, and Steven Crowl, three returning starters that will do a phenomenal job leading this younger group.

With that I'll take any questions.

Q. This is the second year in a row you've gotten to bring two new faces to the event. How special has it been to see Steven Crowl and Chucky Hepburn step into a leadership role and be at this event? I know it's a sign of leadership.

GREG GARD: Chucky, to take the keys like he did last year, be a starter as a true freshman, specifically at the point guard position, I thought he was so even-keeled and so calm, yet competed at a high level. He's in a much different role this year with Brad and Johnny moving on. So now he's more -- not only in terms of what happens on the court but the voice in the locker room, he has a bigger piece of that.

I think Steve is someone that has transformed himself. He started 33 games last year, has taken a huge jump forward in who he is physically.

It's his ability to lead, his voice.

Some are obvious choices that I bring to this. Obviously Tyler has been an All-Big Ten player for us. But Steven also, it's a chance for him to I think grow in his leadership. Being at this event is part of that growth of leadership.

Q. If you believe some of the pre-season rankings, your team is in an underdog role this year. Not the first time that's happened. How much do you relish that? Is that maybe an identity you feel your guys embrace?

GREG GARD: Do you know where we're picked? I haven't seen anything.

Q. Ninth.



GREG GARD: We were 10th last year. I never really get wrapped up into whether we're picked first or 14th or anywhere in between. At the end of the day, it really doesn't matter. You still have to go play the games.

I think last year, if there was ever a story line that kind of washed all that pre-season prediction stuff out, that was it.

I know you all have a voice in that and get to vote in your different polls and stuff. I really don't talk about it. The players I'm sure see it. They don't live under a rock, so...

If they use it as motivation, great. But at the end of the day you still have to go play the games, compete and take them one at a time. I know that sounds cliché, but really it's an approach we've used for decades in Madison.

Regardless of where they have us picked, we have 20 Big Ten games coming in front of us, a tough non-conference slate prior to that. I'm looking forward to it. I love the competition. Our players are very competitive by nature. Like I said, last year's group really was the poster child for defying expectations and becoming the best you can be. That's really all we concentrate on each day.

Q. How long have you been thinking about this game at American Family Field? How did it come about?

GREG GARD: This is 15 years in the making. Something back when Coach Ryan was coaching and I was doing the scheduling for him. It's a conversation we had every year, if not every couple years, with -- at that time it was Miller Park, with the people that run the stadium, then also the Brewers.

Now for it to all come together, obviously I've seen it from the very beginning, all the roadblocks that came long the way. To be able to have that second game of the year on November 11th, to be able to showcase American Family Field against a really good opponent in Stanford.

But for our players and for our fans, it will be phenomenal. It's going to be a regional final-type feel in that stadium. So to be able to put in the pregame tailgating, just like you're going to a Major League Baseball game, roof will be closed obviously. But I'm excited to see what that looks like. I've seen a ton of different renderings, the makeup of it. But to be able to walk in there a day or two before, experience it that night, it's special for our players and fans, one that I know Badger Nation will represent full throttle.

Q. The Big Ten has always been known for its bigs. How important is it in this league to have a dominant big in this age of positionless basketball?

GREG GARD: I think every program, you always look to make the most of the talent that you have. So we've had years where we've had multiple big guys. There's years where we've had one or maybe not a dominant big guy.

Again, you adjust and modify specifically, as you mentioned positionless basketball, according to what team you have that year. It's something I've tried to always keep in mind. I modify things without making wholesale changes to who we are, specifically offensively, and play and try to construct a team specifically offensively that fits the talent of the individual.

I think this league has been known for having really good players, regardless of position. You look at last year's group that got drafted. We got really good players coming back. But obviously a lot of turnover in the league, too, new faces. It's what makes this league the best league in the country, is just the depth of it, 1 through 14, the quality of the players, the maturity you're going to play against night in and night out.

That's what makes this league, gives it the reputation of the grind that it is to go through, it's because of the people and the places that we have to go to.

Q. In this era with the transfer portal, when it comes to building a roster, what is your approach? What do you think is the best way to try to balance that blend of going experienced college basketball talent as opposed to cultivating talent?

GREG GARD: I think you try to find -- it changes year by year. You try to find the right fit, no matter if it's transfer portal or somebody coming in as a freshman, making sure they're about the right things, fit the model of your program and fit from a culture standpoint.

We've used it or recruited out of the portal as needed. I think you have to find that balance. I don't think in today's world you can live with feet in one or the other. I think you have to find the right balance.

There are some advantages, the experienced player part, those things that come out of the student-athletes that are in the portal. But at the same time you're trying to find that balance and develop and have a culture in place.

The guys that we've had, I mentioned Chris Vogt from last year's team, we have two this year in Max Klesmit and Kamari McGee, both kids that came back to Madison.

It's finding the right balance and finding the right fit, making sure they understand what their roles will be and how they fit within the framework of your program.

