

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Minnesota Golden Gophers

Men's Head Coach

Ben Johnson



KEVIN WARREN: The next coach to the podium is one of the young, bright minds in all of college basketball, Ben Johnson. He is a Bell Bank Champion and part of what they call the Pay It Forward program here in the Twin Cities community to help underserved youth reach their goals.

We're so happy to have him in the Big Ten Conference, as a former student-athlete, but now as the head basketball coach at the University of Minnesota.

We'd like to welcome to the podium, head coach Ben Johnson.

BEN JOHNSON: Good morning. Appreciate being here. Appreciate Kevin and the rest of the Big Ten Conference for again doing a phenomenal job, not only with Media Day, but just with what we're doing within our league to make us the best in the country. I think it's second to none. Thanks for everybody that helped put this together.

Really, really excited about my team this year. I want to start off by giving a shout-out to two guys, Parker Fox and Isaiah Ihnen, two players that unfortunately had a setback for the second time this summer. But I know those guys will power through and will be eager to join us next year.

With that being said, gives guys opportunities that maybe wouldn't have had that to step up and really help our program advance in year two.

Most of those beneficiaries hopefully will be our young freshmen that I couldn't be more excited about that are eager workers, eager learners. Combine that with four upperclassmen that have kind of been through it, have unbelievable leadership qualities that have made the transition of all of our young players really smooth and effortless. Those guys are going to set the tone for our season.

Looking forward to this year, coaching this group, taking a step in Gopher basketball.

With that I will take any questions.

Q. Can you expand on the roles of some of those freshmen, particularly in the front court with some of the injuries you've had.

BEN JOHNSON: I think the opportunity is the most exciting part, especially if you're those guys. It's going to be by committee. We've got more depth year, which will help. It's not going to be all on one guy's shoulder. Obviously adding Dawson Garcia, a guy that's a proven player at this level, at the high major level, the tone he set with just his work ethic, how he is every single day, I think that's been the biggest thing that we've taken as a team, is with Dawson and Jamison and Taurus and Ta'Lon, teaching these young guys. When I say 'young,' I'm including Treyton Thompson in that. We got six of them.

Teaching those guys how to compete every single day and to set that tone. When you have young talent, that's a good thing. But now it's like can you combine that with the work ethic of what it takes to be competitive in the Big Ten.

Q. At least four times this season there will be Big Ten games with two Black head coaches on each sideline. Have we got to a point where this becomes coming close to being a rule as opposed to an exception?

BEN JOHNSON: I think our league has taken a great step in the direction with just diversity, inclusion across the board. I think now it's our job in the positions that we are to be successful and do things the right way.

But I think now in just college and athletics, hopefully in life, you're really starting to see the pace turn with just inclusion, whether that's Black coaches in our league or females, what have you. I think our league has always been in the forefront of doing that.

Again, I think we all take pride in handling ourselves the right way, developing our programs and winning on and off the floor, setting a good example.

Q. The themes from the commissioner are charitable work, inclusions, and ties to Minneapolis. It's as if



Minneapolis has to be defended as the host city here. What do you think of criticism of having it in Minneapolis? Is it crazy?

BEN JOHNSON: I think sometimes we live in a world where a lot of things get criticized. I don't know if you can make a right move, right? There's always going to be something said either way.

But I think when you have a Big Ten tournament that's going to be played here these next couple years, you have a city that does a great job hosting. We've almost hosted every major sporting event, whether it's an All-Star Game, a Super Bowl, NBA Playoffs.

I think, too, in college athletics, like, diversity is everything. I'm sure in a couple years we'll have some stuff maybe out west. I don't think change and doing new things is a bad thing. I think it's a good thing.

I think Minneapolis does a great job hosting. I think we use this as an opportunity to show off our state and show off our city. I think the 80 degrees yesterday was a good thing. I don't think anybody is complaining about that. We have another good day today.

I think it's all positive (smiling).

Q. Talking about Jamison battle, how from last spring to now has he evolved and what makes him unique?

BEN JOHNSON: Appreciate that question.

First thing I will say off topic, I thought you did a phenomenal job, must-watch TV with you and the Millers, Field of 68. Phenomenal (smiling).

No, I think Jamison, you talk about a guy that transfers in from, quote/unquote, a mid-major and had really good numbers. Very rarely do those numbers match up when they make a jump to a high major and your role is almost the same, right?

For him to have the same amount of production and to do it the right way within what we're trying to do as a team I think speaks volumes of who he is and what his talent is.

Now he's taken that next jump with not only his body, he's lost 17 pounds, he's under about 9% body fat, but now his experience because he's been through it is teaching all of our guys every single day in practice.

I tell the freshmen that he's beating up on, You guys need to be the luckiest guys in the world because you're learning from a guy that I think has a chance to play at the next

level, Preseason All-Big Ten selection.

They have these daily battles. Iron sharpens iron.

He did an unbelievable job for setting the tone for our program. You talk about a student-athlete that's about all the right stuff, that handles his business off the court, socially. He's what Minnesota basketball is about and will continue to be about.

Q. You've brought in a lot of size and length with this class. Can you speak to the versatility that you've seen thus far.

BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, that was a key component when we were going into year two with recruiting. We were really going to start, Isaiah was going to start at the two at 6'10". He's versatile.

Our blueprint was kind of that: If you have versatile pieces that are able to play a variety of styles, to me, not only is that the way that kind of college is trending but pro is trending, and it's an exciting style. It gives a coach a little bit more freedom if you do have injuries, if you have those versatile components.

I think that's how kids want to play. So for us, we're going to target that in recruiting. If we can add athleticism and versatility and length without compromising the skill part, that's what we're going to try and do.

I look forward to seeing what this team can do with that next step and how we're looking and how we're going to play.

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