

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

Monday, October 9, 2023

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Rutgers Scarlet Knights

Women's Head Coach

Coach Coquese

Washington

COQUESE WASHINGTON: Good morning, everyone. Thanks so much for coming out. It's great to see everybody here.

Excited, so excited about the start of basketball season, the most wonderful time of the year in my opinion.

Big Ten basketball is poised to have another fantastic year. We can certainly capitalize on last year's Final Four and the excitement that really has generated and has been extended across the summer and the fall into our women's basketball season this year.

Certainly the Big Ten conference as a national conference should be part of the epicenter of what women's basketball fans are looking for this year, certainly our fans.

Rutgers is really excited to be a part of this, and looking forward to having a really great season.

With that said, I'm happy to take your questions.

Q. As you look forward to this season, what was your biggest takeaway from last year as a new coach with Rutgers that's going to help you this season?

COQUESE WASHINGTON: Well, the biggest takeaway to me was the quality of the coaching in our conference and the quality of the players in our conference.

When you look across the landscape of Big Ten women's basketball, there's so much talent. There's so much outstanding coaching. That helps you prepare for postseason play. You have to be on your P's and Q's every night because you're going to face coaches who are great at making in-game adjustments, who are great at preparation, who have varying styles of play, so it helps make your program one that you have to elevate your ability to be successful in this conference.

Again, looking at the players across the conference, when



you look at the players that are on Maryland's roster and Ohio State's roster and certainly Iowa's roster, it's exciting to coach against that level of talent.

Q. I'm curious, you talked about the excitement generated by the Final Four last year. Looking back at the time that you've been involved in women's college hoops, how different does this moment feel right now, and how can the game capitalize on it?

COQUESE WASHINGTON: It feels very different. You see now this past off-season, there were so many more tangential fans who were talking and interested about women's basketball.

In New Brunswick, New Jersey, going to get a coffee one morning, and this guy that looks like a construction worker, he had a construction hat on and I had my Rutgers basketball shirt on, and he was like, you're with the women's program? I'm like, yeah.

He was like, how about that Caitlin Clark? Right? Just that kind of excitement surrounding Caitlin Clark and Angel Reese and women's basketball, women's college basketball was spoken about so much over the summer, and I think this carried over into what we're seeing in the WNBA. It's got to be one of the most talked-about WNBA championships in the history of league.

I think we are in a position where we can capitalize on growing our fan base, growing our fan base but beyond the typical women's basketball fans and helping to grow this game into certainly a mainstream sports product that people across the country are engaged with and happy to talk about.

Q. How would you assess where the program is at after your first year with it, and do you feel things are moving in the right direction after you've been there for 12 months?

COQUESE WASHINGTON: I'm extremely happy about where the program is right now. Our first year was really about building a foundation, building a culture, establishing how we're going to run our program, how we're going to



recruit, how we're going to play on game day, and we were successful at that.

I think we're definitely in a position now to continue to move the program forward and be more competitive on game day, and we're looking at where our team is with the additions that we've brought in. I'm excited about our ability to do that this year.

Q. I want to piggyback on what you were talking about, the momentum that this sport seems to have gathered. Just talk more specifically about what it's like to have perhaps the most premier player in the country in the Big Ten conference and what that does for the profile of the conference?

COQUESE WASHINGTON: It's a lot of fun. It's not fun on game day playing against Caitlin Clark, but it's a lot of fun to have that excitement around her.

You go play Iowa, and there are -- the arena is full. There's so many people that are cheering her on. My daughter lives in my house and she's a Caitlin Clark fan, so I have to tell her, you know, we're at Rutgers. She's like -- but that's the kind of impact that a player like Caitlin Clark or a player like Naz Hillmon who was at Michigan a few years ago, those types of players who can engender conversation around our game, I think it bodes well for the Big Ten, and it also makes other great players want to play in this conference so we can compete against her. Great players want to play against other great players.

Caitlin Clark certainly is the leading name in our conference, but there are so many other transcendent players that are playing in the Big Ten, and it's going to be exciting this year for all of those players to get the recognition that they deserve.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.