

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

Monday, October 9, 2023

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Ohio State Buckeyes

Women's Head Coach

Coach Kevin McGuff



KEVIN MCGUFF: Great to be here. Great to see everyone. I'm off to a way better start than a year ago because a year ago I went to put my tie on, and I had put on so much weight that my shirt wouldn't close. I got my tie on this morning, and I'm happy to be here.

I'm excited about our team. We had what I thought was a really great season last year, and we return the core of that group. Obviously graduated a great player in Taylor Mikesell, and we're going to miss her greatly, but also added some exciting players that I think will really kind of bolster our team.

We're going to need to be good. We've got a very challenging non-conference schedule. We play UCLA at home, we play at Tennessee. We open the season versus a very talented USC team in Las Vegas. We play Oklahoma State. We've some got great games in there, and then of course Kerry Kenny hardest Big Ten schedule, so we'll be challenged certainly in the Big Ten.

We also have a really -- on December 22 we're going to play Belmont University where my daughter is a junior playing basketball, so that'll be fun. So we've got a lot of great games, and we're going to need to be good because it's going to be very challenging for us.

Q. You mentioned at Ohio State's media day about Madison, her trying to come along and get back to things. What is the latest on her status, and until she's able to play, what does the point guard position look like for you?

KEVIN MCGUFF: Well, Jacy will start at the point guard position, and she looks great right now. But Madison is doing really, really well with her rehab, and we anticipate her coming back at some point mid-November to late November. We're going to certainly be somewhat cautious with that just to make sure we give her plenty of time to not only be healthy and be ready but to be comfortable in coming back, as well.

Q. With Jacy Sheldon missing a high percentage of

games last year for your team, how did that help keep the other players cohesive, especially a player like Cotie McMahon?

KEVIN MCGUFF: Yeah, so it was difficult. We started out just playing extremely well last year. We won our first 19 games. We got as high as ranked second in the country. Then Madison gets hurt, Jacy gets hurt.

It really put us in a tough position. I think one of the players that really stepped up and did a great job was Rikki Harris, and we kind of play her at every position, and we had to play her at the point guard position, which is probably not her natural position, but she showed up every day and did whatever she could to help us win. We also played Taylor Mikesell at the point guard position, which is not her natural position, as well.

Then people like Cotie and Taylor Thierry just really stepped up in general and continued to play well to continue to give us a chance to win.

Q. How intentional was it of you and your staff to schedule USC and UCLA since they will be a part of the mix next season?

KEVIN MCGUFF: You know, ironically not intentional at all. The Las Vegas event, which is going to feature two women's games, we're going to play USC, and LSU is going to play Colorado, and then there's going to be two men's games, USC versus Kansas State, and I don't recall the other one. It was a good event against a great opponent to start the season.

Then the UCLA thing literally just happened in the last couple weeks. We both were kind of desperate for a game, and I have great respect for their program. I know they're going to be extremely good this year.

So we wanted to add another quality opponent, so it just kind of worked out.

It's kind of just a one-year thing with UCLA given that they're going to be in the conference, and we couldn't schedule a home and home.



Also we were supposed to play them but the game got canceled during COVID. We literally flew to Los Angeles and we were playing two games, we were playing UCLA and then going down and playing San Diego State. That game got canceled so we sat in Westwood for three days and then went down to San Diego State and played them. We wanted to play them because I think it's a great game, because I really enjoy playing great programs like UCLA.

Q. To get to the Elite 8, what did that mean, and do you sense some excitement around this program that the next step could be around the corner at any time?

KEVIN MCGUFF: Yeah, that was a really big step for us last year. We hadn't been to the Elite 8 in 30 years at Ohio State women's basketball.

We had been to the Sweet 16 the year before and lost to basically at the buzzer to Texas.

That was huge for our program to take that step, especially being able to play against Connecticut and win the game and go on to the Elite 8.

Yeah, we aspire for more, certainly, and it's hard to do because there's so many great teams and programs in women's basketball, but that's what we've got our sights set on. Hopefully we can take that step sometime soon.

Q. When you look at the depth of talent in this conference, which is only going to get deeper with the addition of those teams next year, every year you're in the mix, but for younger coaches or new coaches in this league, what is the key to taking a team from the lower half of the Big Ten to the upper half, and how challenging is that task?

KEVIN MCGUFF: It's really, really challenging. The conference has never been better. I think right now we're seeing a lot of, too, and we've benefitted from it, there's a lot of fifth-year players from COVID.

The depth of talent in this conference is incredible, and then when you add the four West Coast teams that are all really strong in women's basketball, it's going to be really, really difficult.

You know, usually jobs come open in this league because something didn't go right and people didn't win enough. It's just the reality of where we are. So when you take those jobs, it's a tough task.

I would say for me personally, you've got to have a certain amount of talent, of course, but it just seems like here for

me, the better kids that we've got in our program and the character of the kids that we've had, the better we've done.

You can chase talent, but my advice to someone who had taken a job in this league is make sure that you get good kids that you can build with.

Q. In your time in the Big Ten, have you noticed arena environments, sort of the excitement around those increase?

KEVIN MCGUFF: Yeah, absolutely. Like this past year was incredible. Our attendance was way up in Columbus, at Ohio State, but you go to Iowa City, you go to Bloomington, all these places, like the attendance is way up.

I think it's sort of a trend nationally. You can look at the WNBA, you can look at college women's basketball, and just the interest level is -- you can look at the TV numbers. You can tell the interest level is there, and when you go to these arenas you can really feel it because the attendance is way up, which is awesome for our sport.

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