

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Michigan Wolverines

Women's Head Coach

Coach Kim Barnes-Arico



KIM BARNES ARICO: Good morning, everyone. It's great to see everyone. It's great to be here again. It means that the basketball season is right around the corner.

I can't believe I'm about to kick off my 12th season in Ann Arbor. That means I'm one of the more veteran coaches that are coming up here today, which seems weird. I still feel like in some ways I'm 25, but I guess I'm not anymore.

But it is a great time to be a women's basketball coach. It is a great time to be a women's basketball player, especially in the Big Ten conference.

I think we are the strongest conference in the country from top to bottom. Two new coaches were added this season that are phenomenal coaches that are going to bring an exciting style of play, along with so many tremendous, tremendous coaches that I admire returning, as well as student-athletes.

We have some of the best women's basketball players in the country in our league, and I think we're definitely going to be fighting for championships this season.

It's a great time. I've kind of watched our league evolve through the years, and I'm just excited to be a part of it and excited to be a part of this conference.

Just to talk a little bit about our program, our team, we graduated three players last year. One was drafted in the WNBA in Leigha Brown, played for the Connecticut Sun all season long, so had a great season with them.

Emily Kiser, who is now playing professionally in Greece, so we graduated and lost a lot of experience, so it will be a different type of year for us, but I'm excited to see what we have in store.

We return Laila Phelia, who had a tremendous year last year as a sophomore and was the unanimous pick to the preseason team. She had a great summer. She played USA Basketball this summer and has just really worked incredibly hard on her game and gets better and better

every time out.

She's just a special player, and I'm excited to have her lead our team this year, as well as Cameron Williams who is a returning starter for us, and she's with us today.

She's a 6'4" post player who we're expecting to follow up the lead of a Naz Hillmon or an Emily Kiser and try to average around a double-double for us. That would be nice.

Then we have a number of grad transfers, which is something that we really haven't had in the past, but with the landscape of college athletics changing, we went into the portal this year, and Lauren Hansen is a point guard for us who transferred from Missouri. She's one of three grad transfers for us that is with us today.

She will be in our starting lineup at the point guard position.

So a different team than we've seen in years, but a team that has a little bit of a chip on their shoulder, a little bit of something to prove. It's been a tremendous couple of weeks working. We had an exciting international trip this summer to Croatia and Italy, so got a chance to get acclimated with each other, and are really enjoying practicing and getting the chemistry going with our team this year.

That's a little bit about us and a little bit about the league.

I guess I would open it up to any questions.

Q. With Laila Phelia coming into her junior year and having that USA Basketball experience over the summer, what kinds of expectations do you have for her making a big solid jump this year with the graduation of three players?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, Laila, and you guys know, anybody that had a chance to watch our team the last couple of years, she always said her freshman year, the reason for her success, was our older kids pouring into her.

She always talked about Naz Hillmon, Leigha Brown, Emily



Kiser just pouring into her and helping her feel comfortable on the floor as a young player in our program, and her work ethic and her commitment to improve every year has gotten stronger and stronger and stronger.

She knows now being a junior on our team that it's her turn to have that leadership role and her turn to give back and her turn to pour into the younger kids, while at the same time continuing to improve her game.

I think when she went with USA Basketball this summer she had an opportunity to play a different role. For us, we needed her to score so much last year. We needed her to defend the other team's best player.

But she really embraced that role, and it was so fun to watch her this summer on that team where she didn't have that scoring role, but she became a distributor, and she locked down some of the best players, women, in international basketball.

I think that really gave her a ton of confidence.

We really talked a lot this summer when she was playing about her plus/minus in games and not necessarily how many points she scored in the box score but how she affected the game, and I think she really grew as a player with that experience, and that has translated to our team this season.

Q. Last season Jordan Hobbs had a nice game against Wisconsin at the end of the year. She wasn't a full-time starter but did start a few games. What do you see her role being this season?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, great question. Jordan is a junior, as well, and we always talk about your freshman year you're just trying to figure everything out. Well, your sophomore year you have a little bit more figured out, but you're still a work in progress.

By the time you become a junior we always say you're supposed to be on the other side now. You're supposed to really have an understanding. The game is really -- hopefully has slowed down for us.

Jordan was probably one of our best players on our foreign trip. She really -- the game, she told me after, Coach, now I really understand what you mean by slowing down. She sees the floor so well. She has become a great passer. She can really score the basketball. She's a 6'2" guard who can rebound the ball, as well. She has tremendous length, can affect the game on the defensive end.

But probably one of the best scorers we have on our team,

and has now kind of understood how to make other players around her better, as well.

So expecting a great season for Jordan. She's an incredibly hard worker has put in a ton of time in the off-season, and I think she's going to have a great junior season.

Q. Last year you mentioned that the identity of the team has changed over time from running things through Katelynn Flaherty at the point to running through post Naz Hillmon? What do you predict the identity of the team is going to be this year?

KIM BARNES ARICO: You know, I think I understand now watching from afar the last few years, I've watched other programs adjust to having fifth-year grad transfers. It's a position that we've never really been in.

We had two fifth-year players last year in Emily Kiser and Leigha Brown, but they both were in our program for a number of years. So this is the first time that we do have those grad transfers, so we're trying to figure that identity out right now. We're trying to gel with our new pieces.

But obviously when you have a potential All-American in Laila Phelia, it's going to be important for us to showcase her strengths and to really have her involved and have her hands on the ball a lot.

I think one of Laila's greatest strengths this season and something she's worked incredibly hard on in the off-season was becoming a better passer and seeing the game and making other people around her better and not just her ability to score the basketball.

We noticed that in practices. She's leading our team in assists in practice as well as scoring.

We're definitely going to play through her, and Cameron Williams as a senior on this team is an important piece getting post touches.

We're a work in progress. Still haven't figured that out. But those are definitely two keys to our success.

Q. I'm curious, with the rapid growth of the WNBA in recent years and obviously you guys' recent success with Naz and with Leigha, how much more do you hear about the WNBA and developing players for the WNBA through the recruiting process?

KIM BARNES ARICO: I think for the most part, probably not 100 percent, but a large percentage. It's every little girl's dream. I mean, it's every girl's dream to play in the

WNBA.

I know we have three players here, if you asked any of them, that's their dream.

I just think that with the growth of the WNBA, it's been incredible. It's been wonderful for me as a coach, for women's basketball, for the mom of two daughters. We sat around our kitchen table yesterday and we watched that game over dinner, and we talked about it all night.

We got to our plane this morning, and it was the first thing we talked about, hey, did everybody watch the game.

What an exciting time, and for Michigan to have two players in back to back years drafted, that's something that hasn't happened in the history of our program. I think it's an exciting time. It's an exciting time for the players in our program to see it.

You saw players come before you that are living your dream, and it's an exciting time for recruits that are being recruited by our program. Holy cow, Michigan players have gone on not just to play overseas but to play in the W.

That's like -- I just think it's a great time for young girls.

The other piece of it is player development. I think one of our greatest responsibilities as coaches, and this is something that we talk about all the time in recruiting, is to develop you to your full potential, and that's as a young woman, and that's as a basketball player.

We owe that to your family and the recruiting process to do those things.

We want to help make you the best basketball player that we can make you, and at the end of the day, if that means you're going to play in the W, that's awesome. If that means that you went to the greatest university in the world and can now go to medical school, that's awesome.

But I think part of our responsibility is to provide that platform.

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