

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Northwestern Wildcats

Men's Head Coach

Chris Collins



THE MODERATOR: Next to the stage is the Head Coach of Northwestern University, Head Coach Chris Collins. Coach Collins is entering his 11th season with the Wildcats. The reigning Big Ten Coach of the Year, led the Wildcats to a program record 12 conference wins and their best Big Ten finish since 1959.

Coach, we'll begin with your opening statement.

CHRIS COLLINS: Thank you. It's great to see everybody. Every time we come here you realize how close we are to playing games, which is exciting. I think everybody is looking forward to another great year of Big Ten basketball. I know we are.

Excited about our group to see what we can become. It's going to be an interesting team for us. We do return a number of veterans that have been a part of winning now and have tasted how hard it is and what it takes to win in this league. We've integrated them with six new players.

So very much even though we have continuity and older players, we're also mixing in freshmen, some transfers, and trying to become the best team we can be.

Excited to have four guys back from last year's team that all pretty much played starters minutes and were key guys on a team for us that was very successful. Boo Buie coming back was a big boost. Any time you can have the point guard position, someone who has been a starter for five years in this conference, makes you feel a little bit easier as a coach.

The league is going to be unbelievably deep and good again. No bigger testament to was last year we played the very last game of the conference slate. We were up playing at Rutgers on the last weekend on a Sunday night, and they told me before the game as I took the floor, if you win this game, Coach, you're going to come in second place. If you lose this game, you're going to come in ninth place.

I mean, that's just how competitive. That's how much

parity was in this league. I don't see that changing. Everybody is getting better. So well-coached, so many great atmospheres, very tough to play on the road.

We're excited to see what we can do with our group and lean on our veterans, continue to try to push forward and become a consistent winner in this league, which is very hard.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. We'll open the floor for questions.

Q. You have the second opportunity in program history to make consecutive NCAA tournaments. What are your expectations for the season, and do you think this team has the tools to make it back?

CHRIS COLLINS: Yeah, great question. I think we all being a part of there's a couple of guys that have been on staff with me and myself going through it the first time.

Any time you go the go to the first NCAA Tournament in the history of the school in about 100 years, it's a about deal. You have a tendency maybe not to get caught up in it, but to get a little bit satisfied about what you have accomplished. We went through that before. The margin for error to win is so slim. The thing you learn is you can never just assume just because you have guys back, it's not just going to automatically be the same. You have to start over. You have to re-establish habits.

One of the things that made us good last year was how together we were, how tough we became. Our defensive identity and our ability to win close games. That's what you have to do in the Big Ten. You're going to be in so many close games. Can you find a way to get stops and to score late in games when you need to win?

We have to re-establish all those habits, and our guys have done a very good job so far in the summer and into our preseason practices of understanding that last year is last year.

I purposely don't ever mention it with this group because it's not relevant to this year's team. We have to be hungry



to pursue things, pursue accomplishments with this team. Guys who are back are not the same as they were last year, and we have six new players.

The one thing that I want them to remember, though, is how hard and how much you have to invest in order to win at this level, and having the leadership of Boo, Ty Berry as a senior, Brooks Barnhizer, who really emerged last year, Matthew Nicholson as a senior, big man. You kind of got four guys that played a lot and were in a lot of big games and found a way. So we're definitely going to lean on those guys as we move forward this year.

Q. The last time you were trying to go back to the Tournament for a second straight year you didn't really have a home arena, and that seemed to have a real impact on that season. Can you speak on what Welsh-Ryan has turned into and what it was like seeing the students kind of embrace last season, and what sort of challenges you expect just trying to get students -- all the students that want tickets into the arena this year?

CHRIS COLLINS: It was awesome. Fortunately for me, I had a big part of kind of designing the new Welsh-Ryan Arena with our administration, with the architects kind of trying to build a place that we felt could become a great home court atmosphere for us. Seeing that come to fruition last year, especially during the conference season. At times I got a little bit emotional about it because you lay awake at night kind of dreaming that you can have an opportunity to build something like that with our home court.

I think we did that last year, and I think it's going to be important. It's so hard to win, like I said. So many places we go there are great atmospheres, and we need to have a tough place to play. I think it became that last year, and it's going to be important.

Our administration has done a great job. We never really had the problem of having students get turned away from games, and that's a great problem to have. How do we make sure we can pack that place and get as many of the students in there that want to be there, want to support the team? We've made some measures this year to kind of help with that. Hopefully we can recreate those similar atmospheres.

I really thought it probably helped us to three or four more wins, and that's a big deal when you are fighting to be a postseason team, you're fighting to be in the upper echelon of the league. So it's going to be important for us to keep that atmosphere.

Q. Over the offseason you said when you have Boo Buie on your team, it's like having a great quarterback. When you went through what you did last year, that rich success, and now you said we reset. I don't bring up what last year was. How much does he set the tone mentally every single day with this group with the way that he works and the way that he leads?

CHRIS COLLINS: Yeah, that's a great question. He has been incredible in those regards. If I would have said those things when he was a freshman, that's what's kind of fun about maturation of players and development of players. That's what's fun about us to see these guys over a course of five years.

Not the players they become, but the leaders and how they embrace the little things, the details, how hard you have to practice. It's just nice to have a voice outside the coaching staff that can talk to these guys, that all these guys respect. That's an extension of me out on the floor.

I think that's something he and I have built over time, and it helps you have a chance to be successful. When the head coach and the point guard are aligned and they have the same vision and they have the same goals and they're together, I think it just seeps throughout the whole team.

For those reasons, amongst others, I'm really excited to have him back for this fifth year.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Collins, thank you so much for your time.

CHRIS COLLINS: Thank you, guys.

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