

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

Wednesday, October 2, 2024

Rosemont, Illinois, USA

Women's Basketball

Jan Jensen

Iowa

Dawn Plitzuweit

Minnesota

Amy Williams

Nebraska

THE MODERATOR: We start off by bringing in three of the head coaches now and just have a roundtable chat minus the table. We have Amy Williams starting her ninth year at Nebraska, Dawn Plitzuweit, second year at Minnesota, and Jan Jensen's first year at Iowa. It's Jan's first year at Iowa. I'm sure you said you would take it easy on her, maybe rest your starters when you play her.

JAN JENSEN: I have not gotten that email yet.

THE MODERATOR: Now is a great chance.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: We're just welcoming Jan. We've known Jan for a long time. She's going to do a great job.

THE MODERATOR: All three of you have been in the league for a handful of years now. Give me an idea how strong Big Ten Women's Basketball is at this moment in time?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Go ahead, Jan. You've been in the Big Ten the longest I think, girl.

JAN JENSEN: I'm new but old, right?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: Right.

JAN JENSEN: I think it's tremendously strong. It always has been. Now when you are adding our friends from the old Pac-12, it instantaneously gets a lot stronger. People have asked me often, what does that mean for the Big Ten? I said, well, it means it gets a whole lot tougher to win the Big Ten championship, but also makes it a whole lot more fun.

I think all of us in the Big Ten, what we love about it is, you know, there's not a cupcake in the Big Ten. Inviting those



PRESENTED BY
TIAA

folks in, it's no different than getting ready to fly to play Maryland. We're going to have to bring our A-game for everybody in this league. That's how I feel about it.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: I think certainly the strength of the Big Ten has continued to grow over the course of time, and now it takes another step forward. That's exciting. It's exciting. Women's basketball is on this massive growth period right now. We're in the middle of it, and now we add four teams that are going to continue to help us build our brand nationally, and it's really exciting for us.

AMY WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think we've been saying a lot lately that we've never seen anything quite like what we're seeing right now in women's basketball in general, but I feel like this league might be unlike anything we've ever seen before.

Just the competition from top to bottom, 18 teams -- 18 of the best teams in the country. Just pretty special. To be the best you have to play the best, you have to beat the best, and we're going to have that opportunity pretty much every night.

THE MODERATOR: Right. Obviously the headline-grabbing part about this year is the new addition of the West Coast teams. To your point, this league has gotten so much stronger in the last handful of years. I remember not that long ago, like when we started the network, we would be doing the Big Ten tournament and talking about how, well, there's three teams that are going to make the NCAA Tournament, and we're ways away, triple that this year. What is it about the core of the league, whether it's coaching, players, atmosphere? What do you think has changed in the last handful of years?

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: I think the depth of the league as you are talking about has continued to grow, which means I think it's a mix of great players, great coaches. Last year the league was as veteran as ever. I think this year is going to be another veteran year. Again, we have a lot of players using COVID years just nationally. Again, I think it's just the experience in the league is something that is really, really special and very challenging.



THE MODERATOR: What do you think, Amy?

AMY WILLIAMS: I agree with that. I think the coaching in this league is just unbelievable. The scouting, the IQ of the basketball players. Every program, every coaching staff has seemed to raise the bar with transfer portal recruiting, bringing in some of the best players, retaining the best players in this league.

We're watching just outstanding, deep built teams continue to advance.

JAN JENSEN: I think with that the fan bases have gotten much more involved. They're educating themselves.

I think when I first started in the league, no one was caring about our recruiting. I mean, we obviously were, but now you can't get on Twitter without somebody telling me, you know, who we're going to get and who we're not going to get, and they know exactly who is coming to a football game and who isn't coming.

I think that just is another sign that people are vested. They know what's at stake if we get a kid, if we don't get a kid. I think when we play, we have such great rivalries right here being border states, but the fans come out for those games. I think that just adds to the excitement. It adds to our ability to really go into homes that we probably weren't in a decade ago and be able to say, hey, you come here and you're going to be playing in one of the premiere leagues.

When you get the better players across the board, then all of a sudden, what Amy said and Dawn said, it gets to be an unbelievable game atmosphere, but also what you have to do to prepare. Scout prep is pretty incredible.

THE MODERATOR: It does feel like almost every single Big Ten stadium has set an all-time attendance record in the last two years for a home game. It's been really fascinating to watch.

You brought up the transfer portal. I think the three of you all seem to have slightly different rosters in terms of transfer portal.

Amy, a lot of your roster is kids that you've had since they were straight out of high school. Jan, you have a lot of that too. You do have one of the biggest transfers this year in Lucy Olsen. Dawn, you have a mix of a bunch of transfers coming in this year as well as some freshmen.

How has the way you look at players who can come into your program changed over the last few years since the transfer portal became a thing? I'll start with you, Dawn.

DAWN PLITZUWEIT: I think certainly we really want to build this program at Minnesota and base it around young ladies that we can bring out of high school and continue to grow them and have four-year players that continue to build this into something really, really special.

At the same time we now have opportunities to complement the players that we have with players that are coming in from the transfer portal. I think it's an opportunity right now to really strengthen our program. I think it's to strengthen our conference. You're seeing that across the board within our conference with the quality of players that are being added out of the transfer portal.

I think it's something that makes the league and each one of our programs, but the league even more challenging because we have a chance to become more veteran. Last year we were the youngest team in the Big Ten in a very veteran conference. Not necessarily where you really want to be.

So having an opportunity to become older and become more veteran is something that we've been provided that opportunity with the transfer portal.

AMY WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think the transfer portal recruiting has become something that all of our coaching staffs kind of across the country are, like, becoming good at. I think for a while it was high school. Then people started really looking internationally. I think internationally there are a lot of young women that think, I can come to the United States and play on a big stage with college basketball. Now I think transfer portal is just another aspect that you're paying attention to on a daily basis. As a coaching staff we're coming in and really working to establish the relationships we always have had in the high school recruiting realm, but knowing that that's a huge part of recruiting moving forward and staffs are getting really good at it.

JAN JENSEN: I think the transfer portal is really interesting because there's no right or wrong way of which to use it. Our philosophy has been to use it strictly for need-based, not necessarily to get better right away based. Not one is more right than the other.

I think you mentioned Amy's veteran team, a lot of the kids stuck together. That's how our teams the last couple of years were, and I think the fan bases really have appreciated that. I think I hear a lot of times fans, whether it's in football fans, men's basketball fans, sometimes it's hard to connect if the portal is used -- in men it's a little bit different because you have the one and donees on top of sometimes the portal.

So my preference is to use the portal need-based. We needed a point guard. It was harder to get one after Caitlin Clark. Even when she was playing, definitely hard when someone didn't know if she was going to use her fifth year or not, right? So we're really grateful that we got Lucy Olsen.

It's going to be interesting, as Dawn mentioned, as we continue to traverse this journey of how to use it and what philosophy you can continue. I think all of us are trying to remain a college basketball team, and in this day and age it seemingly gets harder and harder to remain that, but I think that's the reason we all got into it is to coach high school kids and see them develop. That's certainly what I'm going to try to do.

THE MODERATOR: Jan, Dawn, Amy, thank you for starting off our roundtable discussion.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports