

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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Women's Basketball Panel

Teri Moren

Indiana

Kelly Graves

Oregon

Cori Close

UCLA



PRESENTED BY
TIAA

THE MODERATOR: Next three teams we're talking with are UCLA, Indiana, and Oregon. We're glad to bring in Cori Close, Kelly Graves, and Teri Moren now as we continue our roundtable discussion. Let me start with this again; happy to have two new West Coast additions. How have you noticed your programs changing now that you are officially members of the Big Ten?

KELLY GRAVES: Well, I don't think it's changed a whole lot. When you get to be my age, you kind of keep things pretty much the same. But I'm actually really excited.

At first you have mixed emotions, but once I had a chance to really dive in and see the new schools, the new coaches -- by the way, great coaching league.

THE MODERATOR: Yeah. How about that Indiana coach, by the way?

KELLY GRAVES: Well, one of the best I've ever seen. No, I think it's just the opportunity to go to see new places and see new programs and play against new people I think is really exciting.

So, yeah, again, I don't think it's changed me much, but it's kind of rejuvenated me a little bit.

CORI CLOSE: I think the bottom line is if you want to play in the best, you want to be led by the best and be a part of a group that's going to push you every single day.

I think the leadership of the entire Big Ten has been really impressive to me. Actually Kelly and I were talking at the coaches meeting just how much and how impressed we were with the leadership and vision, especially in these crazy, changing times.

I just feel really secure to know that I'm stepping into the best league in the country.

THE MODERATOR: Have you noticed a change, Teri, in terms of recruiting that now it is literally a national conference?

TERI MOREN: No doubt about it. You know, the competition now, right, with recruiting and going up against some of the very best in the country has made it even more challenging I think for everybody, but we're excited. The league, the Big Ten, was already really a good league, and just with the addition of these four, it's even that much better.

We're excited now that we can talk about expanding, right, and going West and being able to talk to recruits. Even though you're from that part of the country, there's an opportunity maybe to come to the Midwest, but also go back, right, where some of your family and friends are and be able to play in front of them as well.

We're excited with the addition of the four really, really great teams.

THE MODERATOR: The schedule this year with 18 teams will be 18 conference games for each squad, which means 16 you will play once, and one team you will end up playing twice. Early thoughts on that schedule?

CORI CLOSE: I think it's the only way you could do it. I think this first year I think it's definitely the best road to take. I think there's going to be some of it where we're just going to have to feel it out this first year, but I love that it's going to be -- everybody is going to be pretty much balanced.

I haven't been a part of a balanced schedule like that for many years. Then for playing your rival twice, I think it's going to be a really good situation and I'm excited to do it.

TERI MOREN: I think Cori hit it on the head with the balanced schedule. For the longest time -- and I've been in this league for --

THE MODERATOR: A little while.

TERI MOREN: Yeah, a little while. That was always a source of concern, was not playing a balanced schedule. So I think that it's such an incredibly difficult challenge for the Big Ten to put together a schedule, but I think, as Cori said, I think this is the best way to do it right now.

KELLY GRAVES: One of the things that's interesting as a coach is the ability to make adjustments. When you play a team twice, you know, you can -- that's kind of fun. It's a fun challenge, and we just don't get that opportunity.

By the way, the two LAs playing each other twice is going to be great for the conference, great for women's basketball in general. I've seen those two programs up close for a long time, and what they have going is pretty special.

But, yeah, I think it's great. That's a lot of different teams that we get to play, a lot of different styles. So it will be challenging as a coach for sure.

THE MODERATOR: We could have a home and home. We'll just make it a 34-game conference schedule. Tony Petitti, you okay with that? They're all on board.

KELLY GRAVES: Actually, I wouldn't be opposed to that because it's hard to get people to come to Eugene. We're way, way out there in the middle kind of nowhere.

THE MODERATOR: That being said, you bring me to my next point, which is one of the themes with women's college basketball is how the casual fan has started gobbling up this sport. You've all been coaching for a while now. There has long been a core of wonderful women's college basketball fans, but sometimes in certain places those casual fans on the perimeter just weren't there. What is it like with all three of your history in the sport to be seeing the way that those casual fans are not only coming, but they're staying and they're bringing friends?

TERI MOREN: Well, for me I'm obviously older and have watched this great game evolve. So I tell our kids all the time what a great time it is to be a female in sport, but particularly in women's basketball right now with the popularity and all the people, the crowds, the fans that are coming out to watch us play and stay and keep coming back.

It's been really, really great for me to watch, watch it evolve, develop. So grateful that I'm still present here to be able to see it happening. I think we can continue to make more steps also to -- our goal is to sell out Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall like our men do. That's one of our goals.

Some might say that will never happen, but I'm the optimistic one. The glass is always, right, half full for me. I think we can get it done.

KELLY GRAVES: Yeah, you know, just -- I started my coaching journey back in the '80s, and to see the difference in athleticism and skill and excitement has been tremendous. I mean, it's incredible.

Especially with the last few years in the Big Ten, the way the crowds have come out, that's what I'm really looking forward to. There are some venues in our older conference that just quite frankly didn't draw that well at times, and now to know that you're going to go into most arenas and it's going to be full, avid fans who are really into it, I think is going to be pretty fun.

Again, to see what our counterparts down there in LA have done, and there were times, right?

CORI CLOSE: Oh, it was tough.

KELLY GRAVES: Not too many years ago where it was tough to draw fans. You would go down there and know pretty much everybody in the stands. Now you can't get a seat.

So I think it's just -- we're riding the crest of a really big wave, and I think we need to keep that going.

TERI MOREN: Well said.

CORI CLOSE: I've been coaching 31 years. I've actually been in both of their arenas to play them when it was packed, and now to have that be a part of the Big Ten Conference family is spectacular.

At UCLA we had our first sell-out since 1978, so over 13,000 people. We are expecting three to four of those this year.

To just be a part of the progression, it's really not about any of us. It's about being part of something and a growth curve that's bigger than any of us. For me just watching it is like, okay, this is going to go long past.

I think you hit it great in terms of the casual fan. It's the person that has always watched from afar and now they're jumping in. I think we're getting more and more of that, and I think we're just scratching the surface.

THE MODERATOR: Have any of you had to have a conversation with your players of, like, this isn't normal; this is not what we had when we started out; I hope you are

appreciating having this kind of attention?

CORI CLOSE: I want them to think it is normal. I want that to be their standard. I want them to have great humility and gratitude, so I do think there's a part of understanding the history of that, but at the same time I want them to think this is a baseline expectation, and we just want to see it grow from here.

TERI MOREN: I agree with Cori, but I try to remind our kids always, especially after the game, to take that moment, right, and just look around at all the people that are there to support them and be in Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall on that Saturday afternoon, because it is incredible, right?

I want them to take those moments and remember those moments, what that feels like. Completely want it to be the standard, but I also want them to be in the present moment and have a tremendous amount of gratitude for the fans that come out and support us.

KELLY GRAVES: Well, and I'm excited for the rest of the Big Ten to see what a great venue Matthew Knight Arena is. We have avid fans. We've had great fan support for a long, long time. They understand basketball, and it can get really loud in there.

Again, as much as I'm excited to go to other venues, I'm really excited to see fans come and enjoy Eugene.

THE MODERATOR: New floor is super cool too.

KELLY GRAVES: It is pretty cool.

THE MODERATOR: The Ducks migrating.

KELLY GRAVES: With fewer trees. We had so many trees on the old floor we had a lot of freshmen that got lost through the trees, on the defensive end a lot. Yeah, the new floor is spectacular.

THE MODERATOR: Give me something that each of you are excited about specifically when it comes to your team, whether it's a new player or a development of something, or a venue you're going to visit this year. Let me start down there with you, Cori, something that you just can't wait to have happen this year.

CORI CLOSE: Well, I think two things. One is our depth and versatility is spectacular. It's the most talent but also the most (audio glitch) different ways of any team that I have ever coached, which is really fun. It's hard to pass up on we open the year in Paris playing Louisville.

To be one of the first college basketball games, men or women, to be played on ESPN in Paris, what a dream. I'm very excited to experience that.

KELLY GRAVES: Well, for me we've had a couple of down years by our standards. There was a time when we were one of the best programs in the country, and I think with the new influx of transfers, a couple of really nice freshmen, and just a little bit -- some of our bodies back healthy this year I think we have a chance to be a really good basketball team.

That's one of my goals is to kind of get us back to where we've been in the landscape of women's basketball, and I think this is the kind of team that can do that.

Like Cori, I think we've got good depth. We finally have some really good experience, and we have a lot of versatility as well. Especially at the guard line. We've just got a lot of depth at the guards.

I've been around college basketball and coached some of the best guards in the world. You've got to have good guard play, so I'm excited about that.

TERI MOREN: Well, once again, I'm excited about our team. Some experience, some veterans, but then just the development of those younger kids that have been waiting for opportunities and the work they did over the summer.

Just being in practice with them right now, once again, like I said, we have -- they're the best part of Indiana and just to work with them every day and get excited about working with them every day.

I think the sky is the limit for this group. We've had to play differently with the graduation of Mackenzie Holmes and Sara Scalia. That has made us become better coaches. We've had to go back and study and look at our personnel and really dive into playing differently than we have the last probably four or five years when we had Mackenzie on the inside.

That's something I'm excited about.

And then I've been to Oregon, been to UCLA. I have never been to USC. We are not doing that this year, but we are going to Washington, and I have never been to Washington, so looking forward to that trip.

THE MODERATOR: You all have taken advantage of the transfer portal in various different ways because that is the norm, that is the reality of the sport. I'm curious of something you have learned about the transfer portal in the last few years. Give me an idea of something -- the way

you choose to attack it or maybe has it changed now than it did two or three years ago for you?

TERI MOREN: I feel like it changes every day. I mean, it is. It's challenging because of the fact that now with the NIL, there's other components to this thing as far as being able to go in and be successful diving into the transfer portal.

But if you can find the right kinds of kids that for us want to be a part of the culture, want to be a part of the work ethic, they're all looking for something different, right? It's not always about the NIL. I'm not suggesting that, but just trying to find the pieces out there that will fit with what we have, the foundation of how we have built Indiana women's basketball, I think that's always a challenge for us.

We've had a lot of success doing it. The kids that we've found out of the portal have been really good for our program.

KELLY GRAVES: Well, we've been a program that I think has given a lot to the portal and some good ones on Teri's team. As a coach that's been around a while, I was kind of slow to embrace it, quite frankly, and this was really the first year that we've kind of gone into the portal and I think gotten some really, really good players.

Just like Teri said, I think you're able to fill some specific needs that you have right now. I think the fact that a lot of the players are older, a little more experienced certainly helps. I think that's a plus.

It's yet to be seen how it's going to affect us, but I think it's certainly a positive. Yeah, the NIL, that's a whole other issue, but yeah, you know, I've always been a fan of the player movement. I think that should be the case. Unfortunately, I think it's gotten to where they're moving too often, and sometimes not for the right reasons, but anyway, yeah, excited.

Like Teri said, it just continues to evolve.

CORI CLOSE: I think bottom line for me is that it's like -- it's so fast. You have to be a really -- do your homework at a really high rate. You have to be able to be a really smart relationship builder, and you have to know exactly what you are looking for. Relationally, style of play, how they're going to fit in, because there's now not any margin for error.

I think I have two people on my staff that are completely designated to watching that, researching that, keeping me abreast of things that I'm going to have to be aware of.

So it's just a part of our game now, and we have to adjust to it.

THE MODERATOR: Last thing for you, the two of you again new to the conference this year. What kind of welcome-to-the-league gift has Teri given you? Not yet?

CORI CLOSE: I keep waiting for a really good bottle of wine from her, but it hasn't happened quite yet, so...

KELLY GRAVES: The biggest difference is the fact that we have to dress up. I have one suit, right, and I use it for weddings, funerals, and now Big Ten Media Day. I've been casual for a long time. At Oregon we were kind of the first ones to set the trend of just matching polos and shoes and things like that at games, so it's a little uncomfortable. This has been my welcome to the Big Ten.

TERI MOREN: My plan is when they come to Bloomington to give them some really great recommendations on where to eat.

THE MODERATOR: There you go.

TERI MOREN: There's a lot in Bloomington.

KELLY GRAVES: I would not trust you, Coach. I would not eat there.

TERI MOREN: But to say that, again, we're so grateful that Oregon and UCLA and USC and Washington have become part of our Big Ten family. Again, great coaches, great players.

Iron sharpens iron. They're just going to make us all so much better. I think the goal for our league is somebody needs to win a national championship. It's been too long since a team in the Big has been able to do that. I'm hoping that this might be the year that the Big finally wins a national championship.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time.

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