

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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Women's Basketball Panel

Caroline Kieger

Penn State

Kim Barnes Arico

Michigan

Robyn Fralick

Michigan State



good players, really good coaches. Echoing what's been shared, it makes our league even better.

It's coast-to-coast. I mean, the Big Ten now has its stamp on the entire country, and so we're grateful to be part of it.

THE MODERATOR: The theme that's been echoed throughout the day today has been that this is the best and most competitive women's basketball conference in the country. I'm curious to hear from you, Robyn, as a coach who was on the outside looking in in another conference just a couple of seasons ago. What were your views of the strength of the Big Ten before and now that you're a part of it in terms of the level of play?

ROBYN FRALICK: Well, something I love is just how much more attention has been on women's basketball. So coaching -- when I was a coach in the MAC, being able to watch Big Ten Basketball consistently, I was just in awe of the level of talent, the size, the speed, and then really good coaching.

Going up against it, it's, like, oh, wow, it's as good as you think. It just keeps getting better, which is what's really fun about it. It keeps getting better.

Our league this year, as has been said, is going to be as good as it's ever been.

THE MODERATOR: Kim, as a coach who's been around for more than a decade, how from the inside have you seen the conference change in terms of the talent, the quality of play, maybe the style of play?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, it's continuing to grow every year. I think Robyn mentioned from coast-to-coast it gives us the ability to really go into the homes of everyone around the entire country because our footprint touches everyone. So it allows our recruiting base to really grow and to have the best players in America in our league.

I think that's really important. The coaches are continuing to improve and continuing to get better. Every year it's just getting greater.

THE MODERATOR: I'm joined by Penn State head coach Carolyn Kieger, Michigan Kim Barnes Arico, and Michigan State head coach Robyn Fralick.

I want to start out by addressing the biggest change to the Big Ten this season, and that's four new schools joining the conference, 18 taking part for the first time in Big Ten history.

Kim as the longest tenured coach up here on stage, ten-plus decades, what do you expect to change with the four new additions?

KIM BARNES ARICO: I thought the Big Ten was the greatest league in college basketball, but adding those four teams really puts an exclamation point on that.

They're four outstanding programs with incredible coaches and tremendous student-athletes inside their programs. So I just think it's going to bring more depth, more talent to our league to make us the strongest league in the country.

THE MODERATOR: What about you, Carolyn?

CAROLYN KIEGER: I'm just obviously thrilled to play against such storied programs. I think it's only going to enhance the product that we had last year. Deepest league, phenomenal student-athletes who are playing at the best in the peak of their basketball careers with phenomenal coaches that we get to go head-to-head every night.

Best conference in America, and we're excited to compete.

THE MODERATOR: How about you, Robyn?

ROBYN FRALICK: We added really good teams, really



I came I say ten years ago, but actually it's been more than ten years ago, for an opportunity to be a part of a conference that was growing, and here we are, you know, 12 years later really kind of taking over the world it seems like.

You know, just the best players, the best coaches, and an opportunity to be a national brand for sure.

THE MODERATOR: Carolyn, for you building a program, how has the strength of this conference helped as you're trying to make that happen?

CAROLYN KIEGER: I think obviously for us as competitive coaches we want to go recruit student-athletes who want to play against the best of the best, and that's what the Big Ten provides us an opportunity to sell.

Night in and night out our young women get to play against the best players in the world. They get to go against the best coaches in the world. For us when we go sell that and sell it to competitive young women who want to be elite, who want to be their best, there's not another conference that they can go to to get that with 18 teams deep.

THE MODERATOR: As you make a point about the talent, a lot has changed when it comes to recruiting that talent in the era of name, image, and likeness. Players are looking around to see how much money they can get offered. I've talked to coaches who have said it's a little bit of a dogfight out there when it comes to recruiting players.

What has changed the most about your job as a result of name, image, and likeness, and I'll start with you, Robyn?

ROBYN FRALICK: It's part of it, and I think there's a lot of really good parts of it. I think the female athletes we're in a better spot than ever. I have an 8-year-old daughter, and I told her the other day, get outside and shoot, girl. Never a better time to be a part of women's basketball.

The things that matter still always matter. I still think when you are at practice, when you are in a huddle, when you are on the court with your kids, that feels exactly the same. So those parts I love that.

Then I think there's just more opportunities than ever for female athletes, and I think that we've got to find ways to make that all work together. So there's a really exciting part to it.

THE MODERATOR: Same thing, you're bringing in a big freshman recruiting class this season. What changed in terms of the process with NIL?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Just to echo Robyn's sentiments, I think coaching basketball is coaching basketball and your practices and your huddle and all of that is the same, but these opportunities for women, that's really important.

And I have two daughters as well. Just the whole landscape has changed, and we have to evolve with that change. We have to embrace that change, but we have always talked to our student-athletes about using your platform and growing the game and growing yourself and growing opportunities for women.

What an incredible, incredible time. I think we saw that with our league last year, but for our incoming freshman class, you are having opportunities that people a year ago didn't even have.

We have to embrace that. We have to find -- they have to find or the world has to help in these sponsorship opportunities for these young women that can really change the world.

They're bright stars and they're finally having a chance, and I just think it's an incredible time.

CAROLYN KIEGER: I think it also provides our young women a chance to grow, and we talk about things with our players that we didn't talk about five, ten years ago: building your brand, growing your brand, how do you advocate for yourself from a business standpoint, how do you give back to the community with local companies or local businesses.

I think for our young women they're set up for success after basketball or making an impact in life beyond the court. Those opportunities are such phenomenal, valuable experiences for them to grow, to learn, and to be able to take with them for the rest of their lives.

THE MODERATOR: It's such a good point about the learning curve with the business side of things and the social media, the branding. How do you as coaches try to manage now that side of things too in addition to developing these young women as people, as leaders, and as basketball players? Now you throw in that side.

CAROLYN KIEGER: Well, I think it's part of the 360-degree view of who they are as a human being, right? So when you talk about player development, now it's human development, and it's about growing who they are off the court just as much as their jump shot or rebounding.

For us we have a tall task to make sure that they're set up for life in every area, and I think this is just another opportunity and platform for them to grow even when it

comes to contracts, when it comes to negotiating, when it comes to taxes, and all that stuff that they're really set up now and they're getting opportunities.

So when people talk about name, image, and likeness, these are some amazing stories that are happening across the country, especially for student-athletes, and females at that.

KIM BARNES ARICO: I think our university has also embraced those educational opportunities as well. The University of Michigan has implemented a number of programs on financial literacy, on taxes, on contracts, and we have an incredible business school that has really helped us as well.

We have different programs in place and different seminars in place that our student-athletes attend to really, besides us as coaches helping them learn that landscape, but the whole university embracing that and helping our student-athletes become educated in this space.

ROBYN FRALICK: Yeah, everything that's been shared is really relevant. I think similarly at Michigan State we just have a lot of resources. I think our athletic department has done a really good job of providing opportunities and educational opportunities.

One of our favorite things to say in our program is that when our kids graduate, we want them ready to launch. Now they're more prepared than ever. I think of the things they know that I wish I would have known when I graduated. Some of it you learn the hard way and learn as you go.

I think more than ever these opportunities are preparing them to launch and be very prepared.

THE MODERATOR: Your guys' jobs are just incredible. You point out you have to develop the person 360. You have so much on your plates. Now you add in the chaos or it's kind of like a free agency in a way in terms of the transfer portal. You look at all the movement you see now.

I'm just curious, we'll start with you, Kim, what do you find is the right balance in terms of bringing in players and developing them and then finding those win-now or maybe ready-right-now recruits in the transfer portal that do bring in that experience?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, I think just like NIL, the game has changed. The landscape has changed. So it's our responsibility to continue to evolve and continue to grow as coaches, as student-athletes, as young women.

So I think this is just another area. It makes it interesting because every university is different, and you know, the University of Michigan is not an easy place to go to school. I mean, the demands, they pride themselves on excellence in the classroom.

So in the transfer portal we really have to be selective on who is going to be a great fit for our program, who is going to be a great fit for our university. We've been very fortunate to get some great transfers, but I think that's probably all coaches would say that while going through the process.

You know, you have your culture. You have stuff established inside your program that you have to get players that are a great fit. Whether that is a student-athlete that's coming out of high school or whether that is a student-athlete that wants a change in their college decision, it has to be a great fit for your program.

I think that is really important. That's really important to the athlete, and that's really important to the players in your program and to the university. So we have to change. I mean, that's the common theme that all of us are talking about up here today. That's the reality. That's the world that we live in.

So we have to embrace it. We have to learn, and we have to grow and kind of have fun with it. It's been an interesting time. I'm interested to hear from these guys. Sorry. I feel bad for Robyn. She always goes last. I was going to pass the mic to her on this one, but I really tried to help out and go first.

ROBYN FRALICK: I appreciate that, Kim. It's part of our game, and I think it's equitable. We all know about the portal. We all have the same access to it. We all -- kids can leave and come just the same.

I think that is a part of it that's good, right? The other piece is there's a strategy to everything we do, and the game has changed. You have to pay attention to what that looks like and how our specific needs fit.

I think when you are really clear about what you are about and what your culture is about, it attracts that, right? It that attracts with high school student-athletes, and it attracts it in transfers.

I think one thing -- we have four transfers that joined our team this season, and they're wonderful people. They've really blended into our team really well, and I think they knew exactly what they were looking for.

There's some parts of it that once you kind of learn as you

go through, I think it's clear of what you want or maybe what you are looking for, so it's part of the game. It's for sure part of our league, and I think there's been some really good things that have come from it.

THE MODERATOR: That's something a lot of coaches talk about, is that with some of the veteran players they know what they're looking for too so you can better match that right fit.

I'm going to put a little spin on this for you, Carolyn, as we're talking about looking for the right fit. How do you evaluate that in such a finite amount of time, especially if you are looking at players you didn't recruit in high school? You're trying to develop that relationship very quickly.

CAROLYN KIEGER: Well, I think a lot of it is different depending on what your philosophy is, but I know a lot of us recruit players the second time around.

We got to know them in the high school process. We got to know their families. We got to know their coaches. So if they do enter the transfer portal, we have a little bit of familiarity. We have a relationship. A little bit of authenticity already happening, so you are not having to do it, you know, in a 20-day window or one official visit.

When those opportunities do arise, it's asking the right questions, and I think that's where we as a sport are continuing to evolve. The student-athletes, the parents, the coaches, we all have to figure out the exact right questions to ask in a short amount of time to find out exactly if it's a right fit and what both sides are looking for.

THE MODERATOR: I want to wrap up by talking about just the growth in women's basketball. We've seen the last just year or two has been incredible, and Robyn, I'm going to let you go first since you've had to go last so many times and follow up these two.

I know you have a daughter, Clara. When I saw you last season you mentioned she got an assignment at school where she was asked to write down or draw what she wants to be when she grows up, and she drew a Michigan State basketball player.

So you get to see this through the eyes of a young girl. What kind of impact is women's college basketball making right now?

ROBYN FRALICK: It's unbelievable. It's unbelievable. I actually got to take her to our first WNBA game this year, so we were at the Chicago Sky versus New York Liberty. She has a Caitlin Clark jersey. She has an Angel Reese jersey. She shoots in the driveway and calls herself

different professional players' names.

Her favorite place to be is at our practice. Our team is unbelievable with her. She feels like she's part of the huddle.

Now with all of this being said, she's got to get to work. We've got some work to do, but I love that she's part of our huddle. Our team has really embraced her.

A funny story, last year she came with us on a few road trips, and the road trips she joined us on we won, and the team began -- it was Wednesday, and it was Tuesday afternoon, and I got asked, is Clara coming tomorrow? I was, like, she does go to school. They were, like, but she's our good luck charm.

It's amazing and better than ever. I'm fortunate to see it not only through the eyes of my players, but the eyes of an 8-year-old.

THE MODERATOR: Homeschool. That's the only answer for Clara, right? Good luck charm.

ROBYN FRALICK: I'll put the team in charge of her.

THE MODERATOR: How about you, Kim? What's it been like in the last decade-plus to watch the growth in the women's game and the excitement that's building ahead of the season?

KIM BARNES ARICO: Yeah, similar to Robyn, I have two daughters, and it's just great to watch them grow up in this space. Last year my daughter was a senior in high school, and she had to give a number of speeches at her school.

Every single time she got up, she talked about how great it was to play for female coaches, whether that was in Lacrosse or in basketball, and how great -- they were such great mentors and they really taught her what it was like to be a strong, powerful woman in that space and how important it was to play for a female.

Then I would ask my younger daughter, who is in high school, you know, what do you think about for college? She's, like, I don't know, but I'm definitely going to play for a female coach. I was, like, Wow, yes.

20 years ago that wasn't the same because there weren't that many opportunities to do that or there weren't that many women in the game.

It's just nice to even be sitting here right now and look to my left and look to my right and see these strong women and just the opportunities that we're going to have. We just

recently hired on our staff. We have an all-woman staff right now. Natalie Achonwa, a former WNBA player and a four-time Olympian, she's, like, well, Coach, almost didn't come into the business because I have a young child and I didn't think I would be able to juggle things and have this opportunity to be able to do this and still raise my son.

I think it's really important for us as women to give other women those opportunities so we can continue to grow the game for women.

So as much as our game has changed and, I mean, last year was absolutely incredible. Especially in our league watching the W right now, it's -- I can't wait. I was so bummed last night that I was flying at the same time the game was on. I couldn't wait to get to my room to call up my girls or my son even and just talk about the game.

My boy, you know, he's in college. He watches. It's cool to see that everyone is following women's basketball. Everyone watches women's sports. The platform that we have and the impact that we have on our student-athletes have over young, growing girls and boys is absolutely incredible.

THE MODERATOR: What's it like for you, Carolyn, being in the eye of the storm that is the excitement around women's basketball as a women's head coach?

CAROLYN KIEGER: I think it's obviously just so refreshing for our young women to walk into a packed arena to see that they're worthy of these crowds, that the buzz that the media is giving and social media and live TV and commercials, that they can aspire to have these huge dreams and actually have them come to fruition, right?

I think if you build it, they will come. Women's basketball has shown that that is a reality, but it's not just happening in women's basketball. It's happening in women's basketball, women's volleyball, women's soccer in the Olympics, Simone Biles in gymnastics. It's a phenomenon that I think the entire world is figuring out, and it's well overdue, but no doubt deserved.

THE MODERATOR: As a woman in broadcasting, I want to say I appreciate all of you, your leadership, what you bring to the floor. It's incredible. It's been fun to watch, and we're looking forward to watching much more this season. Thank you.

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