

# Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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Women's Basketball Panel

## Brenda Frese

Maryland

## Katie Gearlds

Purdue

## Shauna Green

Illinois



THE MODERATOR: I'm joined by the three head coaches, Maryland coach Brenda Frese, Purdue head coach Katie Gearlds, and Illinois head coach Shauna Green here with us this morning. Ready to kick off the season.

Let's start with the big change to Big Ten women's basketball this season. 18 schools now taking part in Big Ten women's basketball with four new West Coast schools joining the party. We'll start from left to right.

Brenda, as the most tenured coach of the group, what are you most excited about with this new era of Big Ten women's basketball?

BRENDA FRESE: Like I always have been, the competition. We're adding four more great teams into the league. Every night it's going to be a battle. So going to some different places geographically when we go to the West Coast, so that will be a fun experience for our student-athletes.

I think we're all up here because we love the competition.

KATIE GEARLDS: Yeah, just agree with everything Brenda said. We already have a deep league, and we add four elite teams to our conference, and excited to get out to the West Coast and welcome those guys into the Midwest and what not.

You know, you think about the talent across the board, not an easy day in the Big Ten for us.

THE MODERATOR: No days off. That's for sure.

SHAUNA GREEN: Definitely not. Already one of the premiere leagues, and now you add four elite teams, like Katie said. It's going to be an absolute battle every single

night.

Now you talk about making the trip to the West Coast. We have to do it one time. They have to do it multiple times, so it's going to be interesting to see how the travel and everything plays out.

But just the addition of those teams, there's no doubt about it, this is one of the toughest leagues, if not the toughest league in the country.

Like Brenda said, and Katie I'm sure feels, we're in this league because we want to compete against the best, the best players, the best coaches. I firmly believe that this conference has that every single night.

THE MODERATOR: The best players, the best coaches, the best crowds. At least based on the last couple of seasons. Now you've got the West Coast travel and elite programs. What are you most excited about in terms of the momentum this conference brings heading into this upcoming season?

SHAUNA GREEN: This conference every place you go is such a tough environment to play. That's what's I think the game-changer with the Big Ten, and being in it for two years, it's so hard.

Obviously you're going on the road to play a really good team, but now you have to combat the atmosphere. From 10,000 to 16,000, whatever it is, it's just so, so hard.

You add in atmosphere, you add in elite players and coaches, like I said, it's an absolute gauntlet of a schedule.

KATIE GEARLDS: Yeah, it's fun, right? Every day you're going into somebody's arena or you're having a home game, and records are being broken, attendance records are being broken, sell-out crowds. The team talent, the individual talent, where our game is going right now, we're just excited -- I'm excited, and I'm sure all of us are just to be a part of it and to see young women get the opportunity that they have now.

BRENDA FRESE: We're at an amazing time right now



with women's basketball, and you see these arenas being sold out and all the eyes that are on us.

Obviously these arenas, you know, every time you go into one, it's going to be a difficult environment. I think what makes it unique this season is that every game, just the importance of it. You're only playing each other once except for the one partner that you have.

It's going to feel like the NCAA Tournament every night because it's going to matter when you talk about later in March of your tiebreakers and who has beat each other.

It's going to be fun to watch.

**THE MODERATOR:** You talk about the importance of every single game. You have to manage travel in the Big Ten schedule. You also throw on the nonconference schedule.

Brenda, you traditionally have a very, very difficult schedule at Maryland. I know that does pay dividends when it comes to the Net, but again, it's a long, grueling season. What do you prioritize when you are creating with your staff that nonconference slate?

**BRENDA FRESE:** I think the biggest priority is you do want to find that balance because you've got to find those rotations in your roster, but for us we also don't -- we want to be prepared when we go into conference play.

So for us to be able to bring in as many NCAA Tournament teams that we're going to face, with Duke coming in and heading up to Syracuse, playing Texas over Martin Luther King weekend. All those games are in preparation to really help us when we come into Big Ten play.

**KATIE GEARLDS:** Same. We're in a position where we're not quite where these guys are, but we want to get there, and we want to get Purdue back to the top of the Big Ten where it once was.

You don't know where you are unless you play those teams. Obviously every night in the Big Ten is going to be a battle. But second game of the season Notre Dame is coming into town. We've got Kentucky on the roster. I think Kenny is going to do a great job there.

Then we get to play the defending champs, South Carolina, down at Fort Myers. I'm excited about the opportunities we have to hopefully prepare us for when we kick things off against these guys in December.

**THE MODERATOR:** I think Teri Moren said earlier today iron sharpens iron. You look at the non-con and the

conference schedule. Shauna, how do you go about shaping that non-conference slate?

**SHAUNA GREEN:** I think every year kind of warrants something different of what you need. Obviously we return a veteran team. You have to schedule accordingly, and you have to schedule hard so we're prepared for this league.

That's one thing I love about this league, is that our coaches don't shy away from playing really hard nonconference schedules no matter what. I mean, everyone we're playing speaks to what we and how we go about our business every day, and that's why we're also very prepared when it comes to conference play.

So we open up with Florida State at home. We have Oregon State. We have Marquette. Then we play Kentucky as well. I'm excited about bringing some top teams in to State Farm Center, which we have not had in my first two years.

We've kind of had to go places to have some of those ranked teams come in. I think we have a really tough non-conference schedule, but we need that. We need that because, like Brenda said, every game in this league matters, and you can't drop a game you're not supposed to and you have to take care of your home games. It's just a whole other level when you get to conference play.

**THE MODERATOR:** In order to build the best conference, you have to bring in the best players and recruiting has changed so much in the last couple of years. You got the transfer portal and name image and likeness affecting everything you guys do.

I want to start with the transfer portal. For example, with you, Katie, you bring in a player from another level, and I'm always curious to find out as coaches, how do you evaluate that player's skill set translating from, for example, NAIA into Big Ten, very physical, very competitive basketball at the highest level?

**KATIE GEARLDS:** Yeah, being someone who coached at the NAIA level, Ella was the last recruit that I brought in actually to Marion. You know, basketball translates. Shooting translates. That's one thing the kid can do.

Obviously the game is faster and stronger, and young women are just bigger at every position, longer at every position. But if you can play basketball, you can play basketball. I find that so far so good. I think it's translated pretty well.

**THE MODERATOR:** Fair enough. Brenda, you are

nodding your head. What's your evaluation process when it comes to the transfer portal? Are you typically leaning into players you got to know during their high school career, or is it just the complete speed dating process how it's been described to me by some coaches in terms of calling someone up and saying we have to get to know each other in the next two weeks?

**BRENDA FRESE:** You stole my word, absolutely speed dating. Katie just spoke of it, for your culture, when you have a prior relationship and a dynamic, that helps. I think that is huge when you are going through the transfer portal.

But there are times, absolutely, that you're speed dating and getting to know a kid, a family very quickly within a few weeks. Your staff has to be on it in terms of the amount of evaluation and conversations that you have in a short amount of time.

**THE MODERATOR:** Shauna, you are trying to build your program. How much are you looking to bring in players you can develop versus, hey, I need experience, and I need to look to the portal to find that and put that on my roster?

**SHAUNA GREEN:** Yeah, when we took over, we had to build a whole roster because we only had five returners, so we actually went the route. We had a couple of players that came with us from Dayton and a couple of kids that we had recruited the first time around at Dayton that told us no and went to other schools, and then they came back.

So we built it that way. Then the last two years we've really addressed needs through the portal. We have not recruited solely with the portal, but we've also remained a core group that's been here.

So we want to do a mixture of both. We're going to look for the portal to fill needs, but we still believe in recruiting high school kids, really good high school kids and then developing them and having them in a program, in a system for four years.

I think that's where we've had success both at Dayton and now here at Illinois. Also, I always say this, and I don't know if it makes me a good or bad recruiter, but we've lost a lot the first time, and then we've gotten them back the second time.

So we've had relationships with those players that we typically get from the portal and so you really know who they are, know what they're about, and I think that fits our culture.

**THE MODERATOR:** It all comes full circle. They say no

once but come back around the second time around. I want to follow up with you specifically about managing your roster in the era of extra COVID eligibility. For example, you this year had three of your star players who decided after the season wrapped up, hey, we do want to come back.

I know in talking to coaches, that can be a huge challenge when you have freshmen coming in, other players who are transferring in expecting to play. You have to manage numbers. You have to manage playing time. How do you go about navigating that process?

**SHAUNA GREEN:** I think that comes down to the culture and the relationships that we've tried to build. It's about the team, and we all have a common goal. We want to win, and we want to win at a high level.

We kind of had an idea that those three would be coming back, and our freshmen last year grew and got better, and they stayed. I think that's the important thing.

If you can keep people in your culture and in your team and just continue to develop them, that's when you can have those senior leaders and that veteran group that can kind of pass the torch down of your culture. That's something that's really important to us.

Now our freshmen and our sophomores this year get to look at our senior fifth-year and regular seniors and see, this is how you lead, this is how you go about the standards at Illinois and how we go about our business every single day. That's where it can start passing down and where it can have sustained success, which is what we're trying to do here.

**THE MODERATOR:** It sounds a lot like the buy-in is a big factor because you've got to have those freshmen and sophomores who are bought in and willing to say, hey, we'll wait our turn, we're going to stay, we believe in the vision. We know our time is coming.

**SHAUNA GREEN:** Yes.

**THE MODERATOR:** Katie, same thing from you? How do you manage the roster in this era of post-COVID where players may come back for fifth years?

**KATIE GEARLDS:** I think Shauna hit it exactly on point. You build this culture that young people want to be around. I think we've got a pretty good example in Matt Painter and what he does at Purdue and how those guys just regularly come back and his culture. He doesn't have one and done or two and done. It's three years, four years players. They get to the national championship game with

Zach coming back.

Matt is great. I get to go into his office and chat with him or sit on the lake and talk together, but I've got a pretty good resource in Coach Painter there and would love to emulate what he is doing.

BRENDA FRESE: Yeah, I think it continues to come down to relationships, conversations, communication so you are able to manage your roster.

I will say I'm glad after this year the COVID year is out of the window so we know what legitimate rosters and we're not seeing these sixth and seventh year seniors that are out there. I'm all for it, but you know, it's nice that you'll actually kind of have a better idea of rosters as you're moving forward.

THE MODERATOR: Fair enough. Something we continue to talk about as we inch closer to the season is just the excitement, the momentum, the crowds for women's basketball. My question to each of you is, how do we now take it a step forward this year? How do we keep that momentum going and ramp it up a notch?

BRENDA FRESE: You know, I think you continue to produce great product, great teams on the floor. I think our marketing departments now are all next-level, doing a phenomenal job. People are watching the games. We're on television. The exposure is there.

But at the end of the day you have to continue to have great talent, and I think when you look across the board at all these rosters in the Big Ten, everybody has done their job through the recruiting process. That bodes well for all the fans that are putting their eyes on these teams.

KATIE GEARLDS: Yeah, exactly that. You've got to have good talent and good product on the floor to be watched. I think we're in a position where everybody is doing their job for us, and now it's our job to continue to do it and to elevate our game.

I think we are headed in the right direction. I think the WNBA fed off of the college season and the numbers that they're having right now now in the playoffs, it's been incredible. I think we've got some really, really good players.

I always challenge my buddies, Hey, come watch once, and then you're going to want to bring your buddy again because, as I said it before, women can hoop.

THE MODERATOR: Shauna, what about you, but that's a pretty good ending. Women can hoop.

SHAUNA GREEN: I don't know if I can say anything more after that. Same thing. No one wants to come and watch boring basketball. No one wants to come and watch -- they want to watch winners. They want to watch an exciting brand. They want to watch teams get up and down the floor, and that's just what people want to see.

I think that's where it's getting to now, and the talent across the board is just unbelievable. Every team in this league has players that are really fun to watch and systems that are really fun to watch. I think we're just going to keep on growing this. It's a moment, but I think we just have to continue to make this just the standard of what this is what women's basketball is.

THE MODERATOR: Women can hoop, folks. You heard it here first on the Big Ten Network. Really appreciate the time.

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