

Big Ten Volleyball Media Days

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

Iowa Hawkeyes

Coach Jim Barnes

Anna Davis

Michelle Urquhart

Press Conference



JIM BARNES: Hello, everyone. Welcome. Honored to kick off this first press conference of media days. With me, I know he already introduced, but a little more detail, we've got Michelle, a/k/a Mickey Urquhart, and Anna, a/k/a CEO Davis, two incredible seniors on our team helping us build this program.

This year we returned seven players on our roster, so pretty young. We have six freshmen and five transfers, so that's over 60 percent of our team is new. But I brought the older ladies here to help me do this thing.

They're incredible, smart, brilliant athletes who came here to Iowa to help us turn Iowa into a winner. So really honored to have them here to answer any of your questions and start talking volleyball because I know we're anxious to get in the gym and start playing.

Q. Coach, you brought in Claire, who's from Madison. What do you like about her game? What does she add to your team? For the players, how have you gotten to know her, what do you like about her, and what's the difficulty of adjusting to a new center?

JIM BARNES: Yeah, I'm going to let them start with Claire and I'll finish for the grand finale. Why don't you guys talk a little bit about Claire.

ANNA DAVIS: Claire is an awesome person. I spent a lot of time with her on and off the court this past spring, got to know her in a lot of ways.

I think one of the first things people describe her as very nice and outgoing. She's a person that will always be saying hi and wishing you -- I hope you have the best day and say it in the most genuine way. She genuinely means it in everything she does, but then when you get on the court with her and get into other aspects, she's competitive and fiery I and has this edge to her that she is going to win,

she's going to find a way to win.

And that's not just on the court, but how she attacks school and in the classroom and even games or random things we'll do outside of volleyball and things like that.

She also has this confidence to her that I think she exudes to her teammates and pushes into her teammates and makes us better and work harder with her. I think that's part of the transition to having a new setter, is a setter that is confident and knows what she's doing, and that's Claire.

She is confident in her abilities, which then makes all of us around her confident in our abilities.

MICHELLE URQUHART: Going off of that, not only that, but finds ways to make us successful as hitters. It's always, hey, what do you need from me? How can I make you better?

I think as a pin hitter especially that's what I look for in a setter, somebody that's always willing to take feedback, both directions. And she is always the first person in, last person out, willing to work 110 percent extra mile.

So we love her to death, in case you guys didn't know. She is a phenomenal dancer, as well. But she's amazing.

JIM BARNES: We are fortunate four of the transfers came in in January, so Claire was one that we've gotten to build the foundation of our team, adding Claire within it.

We have certain boxes we check with different athletes when we're evaluating them, and she checked every box, and when she got her she was better than we thought.

I told her I've coached an All-American setter with a lefty, as well, at Baylor, and I said, you're better than her. I said, you have more ability, more talent than she does. This spring just amplified what she can do.

She'll fill up the stat sheet. She's a major threat. But she's one of the most selfless setters on top of that. Again, just checks every box for us.



Q. You're three into it. Talk to me through when you first got the offer for the job, what your expectations were, and to where they are now entering year three.

JIM BARNES: Yeah, we're honored to be Iowa Hawkeyes. Me and my family were ecstatic about coming here and building this program. We knew it was going to be building from the ground up, and it certainly was. There was a lot to overcome. I'm not going to go through all the things to overcome, but there were a lot.

Part of it was bringing in and changing -- when you're building a house you don't always see the restoration on the inside from the sidewalk. The inside is what we were really restoring, and I brought these two players with us to help teach people how to come to work every day, have a great attitude, and treat each other really well.

That restoration has been going on for two years, and I think you're really going to see some of what our team is really about this year. I think we've put things in place.

Of course we're inexperienced as far as teams playing in the Big Ten, players playing in the Big Ten, but we have a lot of talent and we have depth. We're healthy.

I think a lot of that work is going to show this year.

Q. You talked about so much roster turnover. You talked about building a house up. How do you do that, and what have you gone through this spring to welcome all the newcomers?

JIM BARNES: Yeah, if we don't get that right the wins don't come. The roster building are teamwork and getting on the same page. There's seven players returning. We're all in for our program; brought in the four transfers.

We had 11 in the spring to really solidify what we're trying to do, so we're happy about that. We brought in, again, after that, six more this summer. These guys did a great job getting everybody on the same page. They're in the gym all summer working out, and they're coaches on the floor.

Both these players could coach a team as well as I can, so they were in the gym getting after it. When we start in two days I expect to just walk on and be going full tilt because they've really gotten this team ready.

ANNA DAVIS: I think building a culture on a team takes a lot of hard work and the coaches reiterate a lot of things every day in practice, but at the end of the day it comes down to us players.

We had the opportunity this spring to have a lot smaller of a group. There was 12 of us. We were able to sit down as a team and kind of talk through what we wanted our team identity to be and what we wanted our team culture to be.

The coaches can tell us a lot of things, but at the end of the day it's what we grasp onto and what we want to build ourselves around.

So I remember early on in the spring we sat down as a team and kind of talked about that. We had a lot of people with different backgrounds, different experiences coming into the season, and we settled on two main things. We're going to give 100 percent to everything we do. That doesn't mean we have to hit 100 or hit 1,000 or jump higher every day.

It's that we're going to give everything we have for that day every day we are in the gym, and we are going to be grateful for it. We're going grateful for every opportunity we get to touch a ball, we get to be on the court, that we get to be together, because those moments are limited and each one of them is special.

So those are two things we carried throughout the spring and hope to continue into the fall. We are grateful to be out there and we are going to give 100 percent with every moment that we are out there.

So those are things we held each other accountable were the spring and then it bled into also the values of the coaches are setting with us and the standards we're holding for ourselves.

MICHELLE URQUHART: Yeah, we set those standards and it is an expectation now instead of an invisible line that's drawn in the sand that may or may not be reached half the time.

It's in the concrete. This is our standards. This is our expectations. Not for ourselves but for our teammates.

If somebody is slipping, it's not, I'm going to get hurt because this person told me, hey, you need to step it up. But you're right, this is a standard. We are family and we need to act like it and be one.

Q. We've seen monumental growth in women's athletics over the last couple years and many would argue that Iowa City has been kind of ground zero with the Caitlin Clark effect and what you saw in women's basketball. How have you seen that translate to volleyball in Iowa City?

JIM BARNES: Yeah, everywhere you go they're talking

about our league, they're talking about the level of play and how women's sports in general have just exploded.

But I think volleyball kicked it all off. Last season was a monumental season with attendance and what we brought on TV, and I think they piggybacked on us, women's basketball. But they did a great job.

But it's just exciting to be a part of it, and it's long overdue that we're opening the eyes to so many of how athletic this sport is, how fun it is to watch. We're selling out arenas, home and away. That helps this league grow in volleyball.

If an athlete plays this sport they want to be at the highest level, they want to come to the Big Ten, so I think that world has really taken notice of that.

ANNA DAVIS: Yeah, it's been amazing to be a part of this athletic department. Women's basketball is huge, obviously, for us here at Iowa, but we also have a lot of other women's sports that are kind of way-makers in what they're doing with field hockey and the first women's wrestling program at the Division I level and things like that.

Just continuing to be around all these other amazing females and wanting to continue to grow not just our sports but women's athletics in general, it's been awesome to not just be alongside and watch these people but grow along with them and see this bigger vision of not just volleyball but all women's sports.

MICHELLE URQUHART: To piggyback off of it, being around all these incredible women and then the platform we're able to build here at Iowa and being able to inspire the next generation of female athletes, I think that's just something that's really incredible.

Q. What do you feel like is a team goal for this upcoming season?

JIM BARNES: That's a great question. I think Anna kind of hit on it. Our theme really is going to be about controlling what we can control. So it's about what we do control is giving our very best. That's mentally, physically, emotionally, just giving our best to the team every day.

But you might play the game a little better or worse, but that's not what it's about. It's about absolutely giving your best every day, and that's the part we control.

We have players now in our home that we've built that are completely dedicated and committed to actually doing that on a daily basis. It's hard to show up every day and give your absolute best, but I believe we have the character and

the people in the room to do it.

Q. Who is your favorite professional athlete?

ANNA DAVIS: That's a big question. You've stumped us.

JIM BARNES: Who's your favorite professional athlete?

Q. Kobe Bryant, yeah.

JIM BARNES: I know mine personally is. People, might chuckle a little. Karch Kurai is the best athlete I've ever watched or witnessed. Nellie is coaching our team, trying to get another gold. Not only an unbelievable athlete but just a great human being, too, so he's at the top of my list.

ANNA DAVIS: Mine is slightly random, maybe unexpected, is Tom Brady. I think that man is a great leader as well as a great athlete, and the best players don't just make themselves better but make the people around them better, and I think that's the definition of Tom Brady.

MICHELLE URQUHART: I'm going to go with Simone Biles. I'm going to mix it up a little bit. I just like another great female athlete who's been through a lot and has spoken out about a lot of things, and I think that just really resonated with me and the platform she was able to build, so I thought that was really cool. Great question.

Q. Starting the year in Puerto Rico, how did that come about, and what do you hope to get -- that's a little further away than typically you start the season.

JIM BARNES: Yeah, we got invited and it looked like a good way to kick off the season. We got a team that's really getting to know each other, as well, so we thought it would be a good trip for us to go there, learn a lot about each other. We're only playing two matches there that we can really focus on those matches and get some good team time together. We thought it was a great way to kick off the season and get it started.

Q. You've had success in many conferences. With the new teams coming into this conference, what's been the mentality of your success in the past, studying new teams and game film, and how do you implement that with the players? What have you two as players seen in prepping for them?

JIM BARNES: Yeah, it's exciting. This league is just incredible, and the teams coming in, so well-coached, and playing there in the Pac-12, they played some high-level matches.

It's what you come for if you're a competitor. You want to



play the best. You want to become the best.

I know personally I study every team quite a bit and prepare as much as you can, and they're going to bring a lot to the table. All four teams are certainly going to make a lot of noise. We're going to make it rough for them when they come to Iowa City.

But yeah, again, this league now is at the peak, and it always has been, but now with these four, it's going to be extremely interesting.

I think media is really going to take hold of it from coast to coast, too, so that'll be interesting just to see how much this spirals within our league.

MICHELLE URQUHART: Yeah, super excited for the new teams coming in, super competitive. Coach does a really good job getting film, preparing us for all the different opponents we face.

But at the end of the day like we talked about earlier, it's about what we can control on our side. At the end of the day if we just execute our game plan and what we know how to do on our side, then the wins will come.

JIM BARNES: See, they can coach. They don't need me there half the time, so it's great.

ANNA DAVIS: She said it all. It comes down to how we prepare and how we're going to prepare for these new teams in the conference, the same as we prepare for teams that are already in the conference. So we're going to go out there and give them our best shot in every aspect of the game.

Q. This January there will be the third domestic professional league. I'm curious what means for you here in the United States to play professionally, and if either of you aspirations for that.

MICHELLE URQUHART: It's actually really exciting to think about the pro stuff. The old club that I used to play for is actually affiliated with the association, and Lauren who's one of the higher ups in there, is actually running a new club here in Iowa. So that's actually really exciting.

I hadn't thought about playing pro really. Thinking about kind of getting the rest of my life together first before thinking about that. But if the opportunity strikes itself, I'm sure I won't be able to give it up.

ANNA DAVIS: Yeah, I think this kind of ties into what we were talking about before with the growth of volleyball and of women's sports in general.

We see the WNBA has kind of exploded this past season, and now we're bringing another pro women's sport into the U.S. and we also have the National Women's Soccer League, as well.

But we're bringing volleyball, which is one of the most loved sports, back into the U.S., and I think it is going to really continue to grow. You have a lot more people that are going to want to play and be able to stay here and have those fan bases continue past their collegiate athletes' careers. So I really think it's going to go well, and it's going to continue to grow the sport in numerous ways.

Kind of like Michelle, I don't like to plan too far ahead, so I'm just looking to this fall, and then we'll decide everything after that.

JIM BARNES: I think it's huge for all our athletes. A lot of our players go on to Europe and play and Puerto Rico, and being able to play at home I know is super exciting. Even for coaches, looking to maybe even go into the pro ranks after college.

I get the question do you think it'll hurt college volleyball, and I said, well, I don't think the NFL hurt college football, so I don't think pro volleyball is going to hurt college volleyball at all. It's just going to bring more and more eyes to the table.

Q. Last year looking to this fall, were you looking forward to playing most of this year outside of your home venue?

MICHELLE URQUHART: I'm not going to lie, I go week by week by the itinerary that gets sent out. So I'm not even sure where we travel to other than Puerto Rico that's coming up. I'm going to be completely honest.

But if we play Ohio State this year, I like their arena. Theirs is probably the best one to play in.

ANNA DAVIS: I also love going to Ohio State. I love going to Wisconsin. I think they have a really great atmosphere that's just a great loving volleyball atmosphere. Then another one is I have a lot of family in Nebraska, and I spent all summer in Lincoln, so I love going back there and playing in Devaney.

JIM BARNES: Yeah, certainly love the next match. That's my favorite. But Nebraska, you can't beat that, being in that environment. I'd love to win in that building.

But yeah, so many great venues in our league.

