

# University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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## Coach Lisa Bluder

### Women's Basketball Press Conference

LISA BLUDER: Ticket sales are going very well, and they should be with this team that's coming back. One thing that's needed, we all know, for a special season is to have an injury-free season, and I'm sad to report that we do have two preseason injuries to Shateah Wetering and to Sharon Goodman. Both of those players would have fit into our playing rotations this year, and obviously those injuries hurt our depth. But there's still so many reasons to be excited about this basketball team.

We're optimistic. I think sometimes we should actually sell tickets to our practices because they have been highly entertaining at times. Our scrimmages have been incredible, and it's been a lot of fun.

When you have one of the most exciting players in the nation on your basketball team, we should all be excited. You've seen the nation's respect this past week: Preseason Player of the Year in the Big Ten, AP All-American, which is top five players in America, returning as the leading scorer in America, leading the country in assists. I think sometimes people forget about that, is that not only did Caitlin lead the country in points but led the country in assists. That's an incredible statistic, and quite honestly, I don't know that it's ever been done before. I think that's probably something we should check out.

Caitlin is definitely worth the price of admission. But we also have Monika Czinano. Monika Czinano led the United States in field goal percentage shooting last year. Monika was named to the Preseason All-Big Ten team, as well, one of the top 10 players in the Big Ten, as the coaches and media think.

In fact, if there's one statistic that's often overlooked, Caitlin led the country in field goals made, but Monika Czinano was No. 2 in the United States in field goals made. To have the top two in the country wearing Iowa Hawkeye uniforms, they form quite a duo.

But we also have McKenna Warnock back. McKenna had an outstanding year last year, led us in rebounding, a



tremendous outside shooter.

We have Gabbie Marshall returning. Gabbie shot 47 percent from three-point range. Again, our best and one of the best in the country.

Kate Martin returns, and Kate may be the most improved starter that returns to our basketball team. Kate is the glue. Kate is one of the best leaders that I've ever been around, and that's over quite a few years, so I'm very happy with Kate. She's been a very versatile player for us and playing a number of positions, as well, because we really need to have Kate on the floor for us.

Returners Tomi Taiwo and Logan Cook also have made significant jumps this summer, and will bring plenty of experience as seniors to our team.

Then we have some newcomers. We obviously benefitted in the transfer portal from Kylie Feuerbach, who transferred from Iowa State, she brings some Division I playing experience for us, adds depth at the guard position for us.

And then we have some freshmen. Sydney Affolter is athletic, she's aggressive, can also play a number of positions for us. Addie O'Grady at 6'4" is the tallest woman on our roster but played the power forward and the center. It's nice to have a player that size that can come out and knock down threes, and she's capable of doing that. Then AJ Ediger from Michigan is a strong power forward for us.

Our offense, one of the best in the country. Last year we were ranked No. 1 in field goal percentage, No. 1 in the country in three-point field goal percentage, No. 2 in the country in score, No. 3 in the country in free-throw percentage, No. 4 in the country in assists. Those are amazing numbers.

We have a pretty good recipe for offensive success, but as you know, our defense needs to improve, and that's been a point of emphasis since we started our workouts in the summer. Rebounding and defense need to improve.

Our schedule, once again, has a great mixture. Playing our three in-state schools, we'll be hosting Drake but we'll be playing at UNI and at No. 12 Iowa State. We'll also be playing at Duke in the Big Ten-ACC challenge. We'll be playing USC and Seton Hall on neutral courts on our



Thanksgiving trip. So a tremendous schedule. We'll also be hosting Central Florida which is a new team on our schedule and brings back their coach who's from Cedar Rapids Washington, Katie Abrahamson, and also a former Hawkeye, and she has had a great deal of success at Central Florida, so that's going to also be a highlight game for us.

Again, a lot to look forward to, and I'll open it up to questions.

**Q. You always like to have balanced scoring. Have you ever had all five starters capable of maybe going off for 20 points on a given night?**

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, it's something we've always strived for and I'm not sure we've really ever achieved, but this year there's definitely that possibility. Any one of these players can score at that kind of rate.

**Q. What do you have to do defensively to be better? What were some of the things that you worked on this summer?**

LISA BLUDER: Well, we did make some schematic changes, a few things, but also it's just kind of more of an emphasis. A buy-in from the players that I think they understand that we got to the Sweet 16 with a tremendous offense, but we could have gone farther if we had had a good defense, as well. They want to go farther. They know that's what's hindering us from making that advancement. I think the buy-in from them is also very key.

**Q. Is this maybe the best Big Ten depth-wise, especially top four to six teams at the top?**

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, it is. We have three teams ranked in the top 10 in the country. We have seven All-Americans returning this year for the Big Ten. It's an incredible conference.

I've said that it's easier to make the Sweet 16 than it is to win the Big Ten championship. I mean, that speaks volumes, I believe, for our conference in the teams from our conference - I believe it was four or five - that advanced to the Sweet 16 last year. It's an incredible amount, and that's without Ohio State even being involved in the picture.

It's a great conference, and like you said, the top six, seven are ranked in the top 25, but I'm looking at 13 and 14. I mean, when I came into this league 20 years ago, you could have an off-night and win at a 13 -- well, we didn't have 14 schools back then. You could win at a 10 or 11.

You could win and still not play your very best. It's just not the case anymore. You have to be on every single night.

**Q. In what ways has Kate improved?**

LISA BLUDER: Kate, her three-point shooting is strong. She looks very, very good. I think it's her maturity, her leadership, her ability to lead this team. She's healthier than she's ever been. She's stronger. She's quicker. She's physical. There are just so many elements. But I think more than anything, it's her confidence. After coming off of last year, she had a good year last year, but I think she sees what she's capable of doing, and I believe it's a confidence shift in her.

**Q. As great as Caitlin was last year, what is maybe one thing she really needs to work on to elevate her game even more?**

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, I think Caitlin can continue to work on her defense, but also just her ability to score off of a screen. Not a ball screen, she's pretty good at that, but coming off of other screens and making those kind of reads.

**Q. McKenna seems to do just about everything, rebounding, shooting threes. She shot like 45 percent, I think. She can handle the ball, plays defense. That's a pretty good all-around player for you?**

LISA BLUDER: Oh, McKenna is a tremendous player. That's just it; the spotlight is on Caitlin and everybody knows that, but we have some really good pieces to go with Caitlin, and Caitlin wouldn't be having the success that she's having without those other pieces, and she knows that.

McKenna is definitely one of those strong pieces for us.

**Q. What makes Monika so good around the basket, the way she's been able to shoot the last couple of years?**

LISA BLUDER: Well, again, I think Coach Jensen is one of the best post coaches in America. I think she's an excellent teacher, and you can see that over and over again from the posts that we've had some into this program to their progress and how they leave this program. I think that's a part of it.

I think Monika saw and learned from Megan, saw how hard you have to work and how you practice, and it really has helped her.

She really worked hard on changing her shooting style

from her freshman year to her sophomore year. She completely changed her shooting style, which is very hard to do when you're 19, 20 years old and you've been doing something all of your life. So give credit to her; she puts the time in in the gym.

**Q. You basically have six starters back with Kylie being one. Where does she fit in in the pecking order?**

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, I think we're still trying to figure that out right now because she does have great experience playing in a good conference, starter for Division I. That's an amazing experience that she's already had, but she hasn't had the Iowa experience yet. She's like a freshman coming in as far as knowing our offense and defensive schemes.

She does have the experience, but she still has learning to do as far as how we run our system over here. But she's going to be tremendous. I'm very excited about having Kylie on our team.

**Q. You had five players average over 30 minutes a game last year. With the depth you have coming back and then Kylie coming on, do you feel a lot more comfortable spreading out those minutes to other players?**

LISA BLUDER: You know, yes, we do. I think our depth is better this year, especially, like you say, with Kylie and Tomi and Syd and Logan. But the loss of Sharon and Shateah certainly hurt us in that area.

You know, playing 30 minutes a game is not that unusual around the country if you look. Caitlin played a lot of minutes last year, no doubt. Would she want it any other way? No. She wants to be on the court for 40 minutes if she could. I'm hoping that we can spread those out a little bit more this year.

**Q. With the loss of Sharon, does that elevate O'Grady into kind of that backup role? Where does Logan fit in there getting some minutes behind Monika?**

LISA BLUDER: They both will. They'll both play the 5 position. Right now Logan is a little bit more ahead of the curve just because of, again, her experience. When you've been around as a senior and you've seen so much and you know things -- Logan just doesn't make mistakes. Logan gets out on the floor, and you may not notice her all the time, but sometimes that's a good thing. I mean, we have enough offense that we don't have to have her be an offensive threat. We just need her to go in there and play great defense, rebound and not make mistakes. That's what Logan does.

Addie right now is still in that learning curve a little bit. Sometimes I think it takes freshmen and newcomers probably until Christmas when that lightbulb really turns on about our offense, but then when it turns on the whole world opens up to them once they kind of fully understand our offense.

**Q. You said Kate and maybe Tomi might be your best inside-outside defenders; was that from last year?**

LISA BLUDER: Kate Martin can guard anybody on the court. I would put her on anybody, honestly. It doesn't matter if they're -- I would even try her on a center at times if they're not 6'5". But Kate definitely -- Tomi, I'm not sure she could guard a power forward. I don't think she has the physical capabilities to do that. She's very good on the perimeter, though. Tomi is an excellent perimeter defensive player. She gets her hands on a lot of basketballs. She's got good anticipation skills, and she gets a lot of deflections.

Same with Gabbie. Gabbie Marshall I think is one of our best defensive players for the perimeter position and does a great job, and she will be counted on a lot this year in elevating our defense.

**Q. Caitlin said one of her biggest goals is to cut down the turnovers, but with her usage rate that can be pretty hard. What steps have you seen her take over the last couple months to try to cut that down?**

LISA BLUDER: You know, we play at a high rate of speed, too, and when you play at a high rate of speed, there are going to be a few more turnovers. But I think Caitlin is starting to understand that maybe not to take quite as many risks in transition as she did earlier on. So she's understanding that a little bit better.

But I believe that she and Monika are probably one of the best point guard-center duos in the country. When you look at the number of assists that Caitlin gets from feeding the ball to Monika, it's pretty amazing.

We need her to get that confidence in some other players, as well.

**Q. Was there anything last year that maybe pleasantly surprised you, one of the players maybe just going a little bit farther than you thought or stepping up or leading or all of the above?**

LISA BLUDER: I was pleased with everybody, honestly. I thought last year was such a fun year, when you think of, again, what we lost and how young we were last year. I

mean, I was pleasantly surprised with so many people. We had so many people filling in new roles last year, whether it was Gabbie or Kate or Caitlin. Who knew as a freshman she could do what she was capable of doing as a freshman. McKenna obviously moving into that starting position.

There's just a lot of people that I thought really elevated their game last year.

**Q. Being such a veteran team now, such high hopes, does the experience help that, quote-unquote, target-on-the-back thing? Are they well equipped to handle that going on the road?**

LISA BLUDER: I think the experience helps, but we're not used to being the hunted, right? We're not used to that. Sometimes I feel like we play a little bit better with a chip on our shoulder and people not expecting a lot out of us. We've talked about that as a team, that we have to change our mentality a little bit and try to -- I hate that cliché, but it's true, be the hunter and not the hunted.

It is a mental change that you have to do. Maybe I need to go talk to Tom Brands and talk to him about that. He's pretty good at it.

**Q. You played in front of a lot of empty arenas last year. What do you think the impact is going to be home and away with fans this season?**

LISA BLUDER: Especially at home. Oh, my goodness. I can't wait to play in Carver-Hawkeye Arena. Our freshmen have already played a lot of basketball and not once in front of a Carver Arena. I can't wait until they can walk out of that tunnel or run out of that tunnel on game day and feel the environment.

Last year we lost our home winning streak. I think a lot of that had to do with not having fans. We really count on our fans. Our fans are loud. They're knowledgeable. They show up.

You know, that really helps provide for a great home-court advantage, and we didn't have that last year. I'm looking forward to having it again this year.

But yeah, going on the road, you have to learn how to communicate a whole lot differently than we did last year when you could say anything and everybody could hear it. So there's definitely going to be some changes there, but I'm looking forward to Carver-Hawkeye Arena.

**Q. Caitlin seems like the kind of player that could feed off the crowd.**

LISA BLUDER: Oh, yeah, you've got that right. I think Caitlin will definitely feed off the crowd, and the crowd will feed off of her. They will be excited to watch her.

I can't wait for our fans to be able to watch her play.

**Q. When you're playing November basketball, I know it's not necessarily a shortened off-season, but how do your players, especially the younger players, adjust to a lot more travel than last season and earlier basketball than last season?**

LISA BLUDER: Yeah, last year was quite easy as far as we only played four non-conference games, we didn't really travel very much at all. I think we traveled to Drake, and that was it. I don't know if you can even call that traveling.

It's going to be a lot different this year, and our freshmen are going to have to adjust to that. We're going to Cancún for Thanksgiving, which is really fun, but it's also taxing and you have to learn how to handle yourself on a trip where you're away from Carver and eating different foods and that sort of thing. So there's a lot that goes into that.

It's going to be a longer season having a full non-conference schedule, so it's going to be some growing. But at the same time I know they can't wait to start playing. I mean, I've heard it already, we're tired of playing against our practice squad.

We have a tremendous group of practice squad guys this year, but they want to play against somebody else. This Saturday we'll be hosting Creighton in our closed scrimmage, and next week we'll be playing Truman State on Thursday in our first open exhibition.

**Q. Do you have set captains yet for the season?**

LISA BLUDER: We do. Our captains are Kate, McKenna and Monika.

**Q. Who picks those captains? Is it you or the players?**

LISA BLUDER: It's a combination of a lot of different things, yeah, but it's a combination of coaches and players and also just the thought process of what's best for our team.

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