

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Jan Jensen

Women's Basketball Press Conference



JAN JENSEN: We were all gathered together in May when I took the new role. It's been a whirlwind, but such a fun ride so far. A lot of people asked me what's different, and I say nothing, but in some ways everything. Kind of how I feel. I'm new but old, or old but new. But it's just been really great to get to know our young women.

When I first took the job, getting to know our new freshmen, they had not yet quite arrived, and now I've gotten to spend a lot more time, obviously, with them, and especially our upperclassmen. Spending time with them in this new role has also been just really a special time.

We talked a lot about "we got next." I've spoken about that often at different fundraisers or things like that, and we just talk about that we've really been so blessed because some of us have been here all those years ago and last year, and the ones that have signed up that weren't here last year, the one thing we all have in common is we are so excited that we got next.

I think we're just all focused on the future. I've really enjoyed getting this team collectively together, and now as it becomes more and more real -- the scrimmages are one thing in May and June. They start to take on a little bit different feel when it's September and October, and when we say scrimmage, we're scrimmaging against our men's practice squad.

It's definitely exciting. The buzz is in the air. I can't wait for all of you to meet this new team in about 15 minutes. Let's get to the fun part, but I'll open it up for questions now.

Q. What advice have you received and really taken to heart?

JAN JENSEN: You know, I've had a lot of really great advice. People that I've solicited, unsolicited. Lisa Bluder has been great. I'll tell you one interesting thing, at the Big Ten meetings in Los Angeles, that was the first time that the men's and women's basketball coaches and football coaches were all together, and I was very new at that point.

I think, I don't know, maybe five, six days I'd been in this role.

I often tell our freshmen that there will be many times in life when you're a freshman, where you have the butterflies and you're trying to figure out the hallways and what's my locker combination, and I felt that when I went to the Big Ten meetings because you're trying to fit in but you're also trying to glean and know knowledge.

But Coach Day from Ohio State, head football coach, he was speaking, and at the end of a night, it was mostly a social time, and I was kind of getting ready to leave, and he came over and he reached out his hand, and I had gotten to visit with him when we played at Ohio State last year as his kids -- were around at a shootaround or whatever. We just happened to see him.

But anyway, he just offered some really good advice. I was really appreciative of that.

I think sometimes in this business aspect of sport, sometimes you can just elevate people or it becomes such a business, and football people are in their world and men's basketball people in their world and women's basketball, track, whatever. But that was just a cool moment because he was just a head coach welcoming a new head coach, and I'll never forget that. It was one of the moments I wish those of you who know me, I wish my brother was still alive because he would have loved that moment.

Q. You're going to be missing Sydney for a little bit this month. How is her injury progress coming along? And any other injury updates right now?

JAN JENSEN: The injuries have been interesting, and they always are when it comes to sport. You never want to think about them. You don't really want to prepare for them. But you certainly have to understand that they're a possibility.

I think if there's been one thing that's been challenging or a bummer, it's the fact that Sydney and Hannah Stuelke, arguably two of our key components coming back, have never practiced together since we ended our season last April.



So that's been -- you can look at it two ways: Disappointing, and it is in that regard to build your chemistry, to get Lucy understanding how Hannah plays and understanding how Syd plays. But unfortunately we just haven't had them together at the same time, so that has been definitely a challenge.

The positive, it does give other people a lot of reps. It gives some of the young people a nice audition. Some of our returners, it gives them a nice audition. But that's something that you can't discount. That's a lot of days missed in the summer and a lot of days missed this fall where you just can't get that synergy.

The offense that we run, it takes time. It takes time. There's always been -- for our staff, when you put that group together, you hold as long as you can because you want to give fair time for everybody to show that they can earn that starting spot or earn those minutes, but there comes a point where you have to put a group together because the way this offense runs, there's a lot that's predicated on the comfortability in the reads. So that's my biggest concern is we've lost a lot of time, where the upperclassmen who know what they're doing, they haven't been able to set the standard.

With that being said, I remain excited, and I really believe the younger ones are giving us all they got, and they're doing a good job trying to pick it up.

Q. I realize it's a long list, but from what you've seen from this young team, developing team, what will you miss the most without Caitlin Clark?

JAN JENSEN: Yeah, I think Caitlin is rare and Caitlin is special, but anytime -- I'll go back to Caitlin, what was rare and especially special about her. But anytime you lose a very senior-heavy class or maybe I should say experienced class, there's just a gap for a while because you cannot -- I don't care how great that freshman class coming in. There's no speedy trick for experience. It doesn't matter, all of us in this room, whether I take this head coaching job, we all move up in whatever our fields are, you just have to go through it. You just have to fall on your face a few times. You have to make a few mistakes. You get some glorious moments.

So what we'll miss about the last era is that experience and what it feels like to go into Maryland, what it feels like to come off of a loss, what it feels like to be great, and to know what it feels like and to expect it again and again and again.

That is how Caitlin came in as a freshman, because the

great ones always do. I will never forget her first press conference after she signed is she stated what she wanted to do, which is to go to -- take Iowa back to a Final Four. Well, she got two, right?

So they're rare and special. So Caitlin's ability to empower those around her, to believe in what possibly the others didn't think possible, that's what you'll miss initially.

But collectively, aside from Caitlin, you just miss -- like when Megan Gustafson graduated, you just miss that experience.

But you can't do what we do if you're so fixated on the experience because Megan didn't get experience without our opportunity to get to coach her up, and Caitlin didn't become Caitlin and Kate didn't become Kate and Gabbie and all the others without the ability to coach them up and all the challenges you have along the way.

It's so easy to look back in the last three or four years, oh, my gosh, that was awesome. Well, there were some times where it was like, oh, my gosh, are we ever going to get this figured out. But that's the beauty of what coaching is.

So yes, we will miss all of that. But my staff and I, we are so excited about the next chapter and trying to do it all again in a different way that we don't spend much time on what we're missing. We're just really focused on, man, look at what we've got.

Q. I know you said when you opened your presser, you talked about the fan base and now you have the opportunity to continue to grow the game. How exciting is that to you to know that you guys are going to be once again playing in front of a sold-out crowd this season?

JAN JENSEN: Amazingly exciting. There's been a few moments I've had in my personal coaching profession, dating way back to Drake, early years here, later years here, but that moment when marketing -- I think it was Brandee Britt who does a phenomenal job, all of our people do, Kelsey Laverdiere, what they started to kind of hint a little bit, like man, this is looking good, I don't think I really grasped that. But then when they called and said, hey, they're sold out, that was a moment. It's a testament to all that was and really a testament to this fan base of their belief in not only what was but I think what can be.

That kind of thinking is right up my alley, is just the possibilities.

But for the fans to be as excited as they were a year ago about such a young and rebuilding and youthful

perspective, that is just really cool.

I don't know what I did in my life to get to have that opportunity, but I just feel really blessed because a lot of coaches -- I said this in this opening press conference when I got the job, it isn't like this everywhere, and it really isn't. I think that was just a testament to, like, it isn't.

You can research it, and I'm not saying I'm accurate, but I haven't read that anybody else has done that yet. I mean, how blessed are we to get to play here and I get to coach here? So very, very cool moment.

Also, we want to live up to that respect, so we're working like crazy. We want to continue to put a really great fun team on the floor. I don't know if we needed the extra motivation, but I certainly know my staff and I, we want to make sure everybody continues to have a really great experience when they come to Carver.

Q. I want to ask you about ball handling because a lot has been made of obviously the scoring gone and the shooting from Caitlin and from Gabbie, et cetera, but you lose Molly Davis. You get a lot of ball handling in Kennise Johnson. I'm curious about her development. Can you talk about the guards and how that's going to be remedied, that loss?

JAN JENSEN: Yeah, I think we have a lot of kids who played either the 1 or 2 position in high school. Certainly Lucy Olsen, that was a great addition that we had. Needed one. So I feel comfortable with who can handle the ball and who's going to handle the ball.

In our system, we've started at one time three high school point guards in our Elite 8 year, so they all have a certain ability to do that.

I think that what's different, the IQ with ball handling, the experience with ball handling. That will be what you'll see a little bit being different because again, it goes back to how many presses did Caitlin break, how many presses did Gabbie help her break because she knew the press break like the back of her hand. When Caitlin got blitzed, we knew exactly where to roll, how to get the angle for her. So that all takes time.

The ball handling kids, I think their skills are good. They just have to be in situations. Every coach in the country will tell you, no matter what their situations were in high school, it ain't nothing like they're going to see now. Everybody is bigger, faster, stronger. The schemes are so much more complex.

We are thrilled with the skill. We've just got to get that skill

ready to match the moment, and the moments of this non-conference, there's going to be a whole lot of them that are going to be very, very challenging.

I think -- I really do, I think collectively our guard court is solid.

I'm excited to also get Aaliyah Guyton back. She is still not practicing yet, either, and she would be slotted as the backup to Lucy Olsen.

Practices have been challenging in that regard. We don't have a true point backup. So I've slid other kids over that need to kind of help hold serve in that. Taylor StremLOW is more of a wing guard, but she's crafty and fun and gutsy. She hasn't shied away from trying to run the point position when we need to give Lucy a break.

Callie Levin has been solid trying to help with that. Every guard that's a 1, 2, 3, we've had to slide them over to the point guard position at some point during practice. They're getting experience.

But I hope we obviously don't have to resort to putting some of those kids in that point guard slot, but you could, foul trouble and whatnot.

Q. I wanted to ask about the freshman class. You mentioned Aaliyah Guyton, but it feels like a group that is certainly talented enough to break into the rotation, whether it's starting or coming off the bench. Who has stood out the most in practice, and what do you see from that group in terms of impact this year?

JAN JENSEN: You know, I think we have a really solid great freshman class. We're pretty well-versed in most of the positions except like maybe a true, true big.

But the versatility of Teagan Mallegni, she's a big forward. She can post-up a little bit. She's got a really quick good three shot. So she's been doing a lot of great things for us.

Taylor StremLOW I've mentioned. She's crafty. She's shifty. She's not afraid to take a chance on a pass, and that's kind of fun. Thankfully we're used to that with Caitlin, so when she's trying to whip it from a long way away, we're able to manage that.

But what I like about that is she sees the court and she's not a true point guard, and she's edgy. She's willing to take a little risk.

What's important about that for freshmen is a lot of times they're just so worried about learning it and doing it perfectly, Taylor's ability to kind of push the edge, that

makes you better. It makes herself better. But what I like about that, she has a freedom to play for us. She has a freedom to be like, hey, I'm going to try this. No one has told me I can't do this, so I'm going to try it. That's really important, I think, to becoming all that you can be when you're not so worried about making a mistake.

I think those two are kind of standing out. Ava Heiden is coming. She's a really nice big player. She's versatile. She's very athletic. I'm excited we have Randi Henderson back for many reasons on our staff, but as many of you will recall, Randi was our first all big center here, so I'm glad that Ava is going to have four years learning from her. So those three are getting some valuable minutes in rotations which we need. They're kind of our biggest needs.

Q. Because of how close you and Lisa were and how much you talked, maybe the answer to this is nothing, but I'm wondering in the first few months of this job, what aspects of this job maybe were a little more surprising to you or more challenging than what you were expecting?

JAN JENSEN: That's a good question. When I think about the challenges of this job, I think the unique thing isn't that anything has been surprising. It's just now my viewpoint. We can kind of joke, you slide six inches over and it's different or I'm just now the next office over, but the viewpoint of which you view it now, that I think is different.

I'd like to think being one of her right hand along with Jenny for 32 years, that was about as empathetic to that viewpoint as I could be, but I always knew at the end of the day it was her viewpoint and the pressure was hers, the end-of-the-day decisions were heard.

I feel like that -- just the weight of it, but in a good way. I wouldn't say maybe I sleep as easy just because the viewpoint and the responsibility of it. But I love it, too, at the same time.

I think just on a personal note, the longevity of coaching with Lisa, that was unique, because for 32 years you kind of -- what do you think? Well, now that person is no longer there. My staff, I love, great. It's just 32 years of history in the tank, right.

I think anybody could say that would be a little bit of a difference. And more so, not anything perhaps basketball-wise, just the daily personal connection of that. So navigating that was different, but all good, because Lisa is having the time of her life. We're with Billie Jean King and here on here and we're going there, and I could not be happier for her. She is always at the ready if we would need her, anybody on our staff.

We're just -- I'm so busy, I don't have even the capacity to really visit with her, and she knows that. We don't just chat often. But it's fun, I'll hear our staff, they're like, hey, I'm leaving, I got lunch with Lisa, I've had two or three of them say they've had lunch with her when she's in town. She'll always be close.

Q. With the emergence of Heiden coming in, you've got two veteran posts, what's the pecking order there, and does all this mean that Hannah gets to go back to her more natural position?

JAN JENSEN: That's the million-dollar question, right? Yeah, Hannah is a tremendous power forward, and as Hannah showed last year, Hannah is a tremendous center. I know there were questions early on about playing her, and we knew there would only be a couple situations where it would be difficult, and that's when we faced tremendous size, and that's what happened with we faced Cardoso and South Carolina, and it was evident.

But there was only a couple challenges that we couldn't handle, and on top of that, South Carolina was stellar in every regard.

I think the hand we played last year was the correct hand. I'll stand by that forever. Even if we wouldn't have gone to the Final Four, but just her ability to be a rim runner, her ability to rebound with authority. There's intangibles that every coach will tell you that just makes you good, and Hannah has got the intangibles with her mindset and the rebound and ability just to really compete.

So 5 or 4, she's going to be great, where you put her. We would like to play her at the power forward, which then opens it up for Ava Heiden, Addison O'Grady and AJ Ediger. There's three in the post, they're all doing a really great job. Addison has made great strides. Again, Randi has worked with her great this summer.

It just kind of depends on how we want to look in that, but I would say right now, Ava has been really, really, as of late, as she gets more comfortable, starting to separate herself. But I expect Addison to have a critical role, and depending, AJ just like last year, she battles and she'll be ready, and AJ had some big minutes actually against LSU when we won.

I think they're all showing great improvement, but I would say right now, Ava is really starting to separate.

Q. When you lose a piece like Caitlin Clark, not only are the younger players stepping into a bit of a vacuum, but some of the veterans are stepping into

new roles, too. How has Kylie or Taylor adjusted to not just standing on the wing saying great shot?

JAN JENSEN: Yeah, that's what's fun. That is what's fun because the team, as much as they would have loved another year like we had, another year with Caitlin, they're also really ready for their time and clearly understood that they wouldn't trade any second of the past time. They loved it.

But now they get a shot to take the shot. They get an opportunity to be the one that's the key stopper. They have leaned in beautifully. Kylie is looking great. I'm so proud of her jump. Boy, Abby Stamp has been doing great with all of her guards. But Kylie has a sense of confidence. Taylor is stealthy with that three again. They have a different level of confidence, and they're competing. There's a couple spots that are open, but they're doing it in a really healthy way, and I've been really impressed with their progress.

I think Lucy is really growing and learning and understanding how we want to play, so that's really been fun, and Raina with her big dogs, the small forwards and wings, they're just a fun group. When we break down in our -- there's wings and points and bigs, I hear a lot of barking over there, let's say that.

But they're just leaning in. I know it sounds Pollyannaish now but you couldn't ask for everybody to compete and push each other and remain eager. They're giving us all we got.

We have our first closed scrimmage on Sunday, and we need it because we've got different combinations and different things we want to really see against -- like our guys know our plays pretty well already.

We're ready to take that next jump. But you couldn't ask for anything more out of these kids right now, especially when they haven't had Sid showing them how to do it on the floor, and we just got Hannah back, and we don't have the really backup point guard, so Lucy has been running overtime.

So I'd say when you talk to our staff downstairs, I think they'd shared them with them and their work. They've been in. They've been in watching film. Sometimes it's hard to get freshmen to come in and watch film because they've never done it, but I know they're putting themselves in a position. It's just going to take time.

If everybody just gives this young -- we are rebuilding. I'm not setting this up. It just takes a little time. But when they get it, they have the potential to be really fun, really, really

fun, and I just want that for them because they're doing it the right way.

Q. Given that new dynamic entering this new season, the expansion of the Big Ten, you've got USC, UCLA, Oregon on the schedule playing in another sold-out season, what are some of the ways you've been able to communicate with the players in terms of taking the pressure off them?

JAN JENSEN: Yeah, I think what's important, especially with them, is that you just kind of keep them looking in the windshield. We talked a lot about just take that rear view mirror down, especially for the play of returners, but even for the freshmen, because it's all new and you've got to keep looking ahead, ahead and next. The next opportunity is what I really want them to focus on, and reminding them that it is a process. It's always a journey.

The Big Ten got tougher. The players are really, really good. It's just really challenging them that to stay in this moment, because if you listen too much to everybody telling you how great everybody else is and how much you lost, then it can seem to be a little heavy.

I just like how they're leaning into they've got next. I want them to really embrace that because we have added some great teams. Utmost respect for all four of those coaches and their programs.

But we also have amazing teams still here. Brenda at Maryland, I mean, they're great. Teri Moren at Indiana, great. We've had a great league. Every game is going to be a challenge, but that's what makes it fun.

But again, I just keep reminding them to embrace this moment and who they are, and I think if everybody will just let this year's team be this year's team and not the one back there and not projecting what they should do or could be but just let this kind of all ruminate and let them kind of start figuring it out, I think they can really have a nice level of success, despite how great all the schools are.

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