

University of Iowa Basketball Media Conference

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Coach Jan Jensen

Women's Basketball Press Conference



JAN JENSEN: I am so thankful to our fan base. They have been with us every step of the way since our staff got here all those years ago, and in my shifting over to the other chair and for us to sell out three years in a row, I really can't thank our fan base enough. It really is a wonderful part of who we are, who this program is.

Big shout-out to our fans.

I think in looking at this year, it's probably one of the most interesting years we've had in a long time. We're the youngest we've been since 2012. I think there are some other young teams in the Big Ten. Nine out of 14 players are freshmen and sophomores. But everybody on our team has a new role, and it's complex in the sense when you look at our team, we have Hannah, we have Kylie, we have Taylor McCabe that are going to play minutes.

But Hannah has never yet in her four years been the sole focus. She's always had a pretty good Robin, right? A couple years ago when she was playing with Kate, Caitlin, and that set of people; then last year we had the great Lucy Olsen; now we have a whole lot of great youth.

But the one known commodity is Hannah Stuelke.

It'll be really interesting to watch. I know she'll step up to that challenge, but it's new. It'll be new for Kylie. Kylie is that sixth-year senior that has seen it all. She's transferred. She's unfortunately had some adversity with an injury. She's sat. She's played. So that's so valuable with a team that's young because we have a lot of great youth that are coming in with high expectations.

But at the end of the day, those freshmen are still freshmen no matter how highly decorated they are, and the portal transfers are great, but everybody is still learning a new system.

So when I thought about this, it's so exciting, and it's fun because we have a lot of different ways we can go. But I think the word, and I think I'm talking to myself here more than anybody else, is "patience."

I think we're planting a lot of seeds for this year, and we're going to be using a lot of water with that patience. I think it's not only this year but in everything that will come after this year.

I think when I look at our schedule, we have a competitive non-conference schedule, and my goal is, as we morph into all these different roles, to use that non-conference as a training. We always do, but I think you're going to see a lot in that non-conference.

My goal is by the time we hit that Big Ten season that we're going to look a lot different than I think we're going to look on October 30.

But the possibilities are so exciting. It's a new year, and I know that the patience and the energy it takes to form a team -- the team forming is always exciting, but it also takes a lot of energy, and I love the energy that my squad has.

Q. I know there's always been a lot of talent in the Midwest, Iowa, all Iowa Tech, Minnesota, but you have a woman now from Dominican Republic, Alaska, Oregon, California, you have somebody coming in from California next year. I know you can't talk about her, but how have you been able over the last few years still focus on the in-state talent and really take the recruiting coast to coast and how have you kept the culture the way you want it to be?

JAN JENSEN: Yeah, I think it's been an interesting time frame for us because the timing of how the Big Ten was expanding was in line with the Caitlin Clark era. The Big Ten is expanding different places and Caitlin is moving a needle, and all of a sudden Iowa is on a lot of TVs, we're in a lot of news stories.

And then the story wasn't just Caitlin, it became a little bit more about the others on the team. And then I think it really shined a light on what I'd like to think we've been doing here for a long, long time, which is playing a really fun style of basketball with quality young women.

We've always started with that. Then if there was ever a time when with the commitment of Addie Deal and others, if there was ever a time to keep broadening that, I thought



it was the time to go for it, with the more national angle.

I've learned some things over that. You can't just go all national, right? There has to be some connections and some shared value sets in how a young woman wants to play or what she's most comfortable playing, if she has any interest in the Midwest or not.

Sometimes we've chased a little bit too long probably a lead that wasn't really ever going to be one or be a Hawkeye, but we've learned some of the best practices and not such good practices.

But the timing was right to go for it, and we've hit it on some really quality people. Our core will always be the Midwest and certainly our state.

Q. Hannah Stuelke coming into her final year with Iowa. Coming into her final year with the Hawkeyes, have you seen her step up in her vocal leadership and exerting her energy and personality a little bit more?

JAN JENSEN: I think it's a constant progression. Hannah is very much more comfortable just letting her play do her talking. So we're working on that.

But I thought her Big Ten Media Day, it was fun to see her when we flew back. She was beaming. She actually used the word, that was fun, and I've never heard her say media was fun before.

Not that she didn't like it, but some kids are a little bit more at ease. That's just not a thing that's enjoyable for her. But I think she did a great job there, and I think she's really leaning into probably for the first year really trying to get out of that comfort zone.

Partially she knows where she wants to go individually, but I know she really loves this team and knows that they're looking at her to kind of take them through some of the rocky times.

So I've been pleased so far. And certainly everything, when you start playing games, that's where we all earn our medal, right?

Q. You mentioned the newness. What do you see as a coach that they maybe can't see yet, but what do you see the identity of this team becoming?

JAN JENSEN: That's a really good question. We're going to play -- we like to play fast, and continue to play fast. But we can kind of get into a situation where they're passing that baton easily and quickly, and we're not having a lot of drop-offs in any way, shape, or form when we're doing that

subbing.

Not that there ever is, but it would be great if we could really get to where you could have a really big lineup and then you could have a smaller lineup and then you could kind of go hybrid lineup. But we're a ways from that.

I think on paper, it all looks really exciting and it looks, wow, this is really a deep team and we've got all this versatility, and we do, but I think anybody who actually coaches or teaches, there is a learning curve that you cannot skip the steps.

Some kids come in with a really high IQ and you've known that. Some kids you're not sure; you get surprised. It's not quite where you thought that was.

But they're coming, and so that's where I'm trying to just continue to settle.

But what I think we can get into is a team that can morph into not just what the other team has and we can counter, but maybe we can do something where the opponents will have to counter.

We haven't really had that luxury, right? We've kind of been true to who we are because we haven't had the size.

I have a little bit more size than I've ever had. We have 6'5" in Layla Hays, a freshman. We have 6'4" in Ava Heiden. 6'5" traditional post which I love, Ava, I love her type of post. It's a little bit hybrid. She can run. Both of them can run. And then you add Hannah at 6'2" in that mix.

We have some big guards, Emely Rodriguez from the Dominican Republic; big guard. Teagan Mallegni had a nice summer; big guard.

There's different ways that you can look at it. If we can develop that, I think it can be exciting.

But we are young, and all is not lost if we don't see that as quickly as maybe we would all love to. But this whole thing when you're looking at a young career, there's steps every year, and so I think, again, patience rules the days.

I think the patience of the individuals themselves, I think patience of people in their camps, I think patience of what we see. Everybody will tell you every day is just a step towards who you're going to be, and our job as coaches is to get us as successful as we can be as quickly as we can be, but you just can't skip the steps.

Q. You've always had high outreach with this program

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locally, regionally, you and Lisa, all your athletes. But since you've really captured the public's attention a couple of years ago with Caitlin Clark, you've been able to sustain it at a broader scale. In what ways have you been able to do that and sustain it? Because now you're talking about year three of sellouts, and you're two years removed from the Caitlin Clark phenomenon.

JAN JENSEN: I think that's a great question. A friend asked me that a little bit earlier, I guess, and I think the key has been I think the way that we play -- the young women play with a lot of heart and they play with a lot of joy and I think it's fun to watch. It's also fun when you win, right?

But I think the fan base is with us, and I think they feel that. If we look at anything in our lives that we're a part of, if you think of a club you might be a part of, a neighborhood you're a part of or whatever, when you feel vested and you feel the folks that you're with feel vested, there's just kind of an ease to that get-together, right? If it's a monthly club, it's a weekly club, it's like you look forward to that club.

I think the longevity that I've been able to have here, certainly that Lisa had here, is that we got this club. For the most part, through thick and thin, we're with each other in that club. I think that's how I feel.

Our success here is so, so hugely reliant on fans because it makes it so much fun to win with them. It makes it -- with your good fans you can kind of tolerate that tough loss because they're pushing you through. I think there's a genuine feel for most people. But along with that there's obviously more spotlight and more critical thinkers, too.

But I think that has always been part of it -- my staff is awesome. We all are like-minded, and we want to have the experience for our young women be a great one.

I think when you work that hard to really have each player on your team, even the ones that don't get in the game but want them to experience this, I think that's why that joy is evident.

So I think that's why, but I guess you should probably ask some of the longtime season ticket holders why they keep sticking around.

Q. When you look at the expectations for this program, through the Caitlin years they were through the roof but even in the following years they've remained really high. Are those expectations something that you welcome, and do your players feel that as well, that this program there's kind of an expectation level that it's been built to?

JAN JENSEN: Yeah. I think anybody that gets into coaching, right, at the very beginning, I remember I thought of myself in the Caitlin era as a young coach. Everybody wants to go to the Final Four.

It isn't until you get into the process of how difficult it is. If it was that easy, there would be scads of teams going to the Final Four. But there's a reason why there's a lot -- some of those blue bloods.

You think about there's so many great coaches that have never gotten to go to a Final Four, assistants and head coaches. So I feel really grateful for that.

But as we've navigated this, certainly that's the goal, and I feel blessed to be at the point in time now where those expectations are high because we've always tasted it, right? The fan base has tasted it. It's fun to play deep. It's fun to go to those Final Fours.

It is a different level of pressure, and Lisa, she used that for our last year certainly with the team, the Billie Jean King quote of pressure is a privilege, and it certainly is. I'd rather have it than no one caring.

But that's the trick because you're chasing it. You're chasing greatness.

I believe it was Mike Hlas who asked me that in my opening press conference when I got the job. It kind of can sound cliché, but I think that's what I do every day, and I want to become that.

But when you're recruiting these kids, they do not yet know how hard it is. They have no clue how hard it is going to be to beat Ashland because they've just seen it on TV look so glamorous and you recruit to this whole thing, but the trick is to get people to really understand the hard.

We want to be here, and if you want to be here at that level, then we all gotta do things a lot differently than you've ever done them before.

That's the fun part, which we were always kind of trying to get to that point, and then when we broke through with the Caitlin era, you wish you could just be a pro team and kind of keep that philosophy and that mindset with all those people.

They've been there, and they knew the standard, and they could be like, hey, this is what you've got to do. We can't take that possession off.

So that's the fun part but the challenging part because

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everybody on our team wants that right now, but the understanding is beginning of like, holy cow, we've got to go this hard? I've got to do this rep again? Yeah, we do. We're probably going to do it about 6,000 more times before we open up.

But yes, I welcome that. It's a privilege, truly, to be here at this time. Now I'm just trying to hold the standard and then some.

Q. With the culture and this Iowa women's basketball clearly being a movement, is there an aspect of the culture that keeps you up at night as far as being concerned with protecting? Is there an aspect of the culture you're like, man, we're going up to this place that we could become vulnerable to what got us there, if that question makes sense?

JAN JENSEN: Yeah, absolutely. I think that's the hard thing. Even in my other role, that keeps me up at night. The culture protecting is really hard. You have to police it every day because there's just so many different wants and needs, even among great people on teams.

But the thing is so often they all -- all the players feel their self-worth in it those minutes, and you can't possibly -- as deep as everybody in this room, I know, we're so deep, we're so deep, I can't play them all, and that's part of the deal. You're going to critique that we're not deep, we're not playing. I get it.

But you can't get a rhythm and you can't really always be as deep and get people as many minutes as they want, and so that can be a challenge to the culture, right, because it's like you have to get everybody to buy into those roles.

But the thing that's hard, and every coach will tell you right now, is the era which we're in. For a person like myself who got into coaching for more transformational, I love the relationships, I'm paid to win, I'm chasing rings definitely; that's my goal.

But I love the coffees I have with my players. I still carve them in. It's harder sometimes when you're overseeing it, but I think that's what makes coaching and teaching so special, is the relationships.

So in this era, it's definitely more transactional. You all know it. It's portal, it's rev share, it's this, it's that. So to remain true to who we are, I think a lot of us in coaching, it's a challenge because everybody has camps. They're coming in and they're wanting to see things for their individual end. It's a whole new era.

But I'm glad. I think we're doing a good job with it. But it is hard.

I feel bad when I disappoint people. I can't get them in games because they worked their tail off and every one of them deserves to be interviewed by you guys and it is the way of the world.

That's probably the thing that keeps me up at night is I wish I had 89,000 minutes in a game.

Q. There are only 200 minutes in a game. I think Lisa said a few years ago that she had players write down the number of minutes that they thought they should play. Do you still do that, and what does the rotation look like right now?

JAN JENSEN: Ironically I was going to maybe do that at some point, depending on how we roll here.

Yeah, we talk a lot about that, especially with big teams. We have a pretty big team now. We have 14.

It depends on how you use that. Do you need to use it or when do you use that, because it's a pretty interesting number that usually comes up, right, and then people are like, whoa, we don't have that many minutes.

But I think our players understand, and what's fun is they're battling together. They're pushing each other.

I do think that they understand how special it is to be here. There's got to be some settling. In team forming you're constantly -- it's a little turbulent until those roles set. But I feel like the quality of the young women on this team, already they're showing me a lot of great things.

We're still, honestly, a work in progress. I'm still shuffling through that top eight or so, and they're all battling, and that's what makes it fun, and that's what makes it hard.

But if it's not hard, then you're not going to be as competitive as you could be.

Q. What happened to or for Ava at the Big Ten Tournament last year, and is she destined for greatness?

JAN JENSEN: Yeah, I think Ava was interesting. She'll share with you how hard that freshman year was. When she was coming in, usually all of them have been the very best. They haven't had a whole lot of people pushing them.

It was a little bit eye-opening, right, for Ava. But in a good



way. When we'd have our conversations, she's a really analytical kid, very intelligent, and was always wanting a certain formula. But part of basketball, it isn't exactly a formula. There's a little bit of feel, a little bit of this, a little bit of that.

Just getting in and honing the skills that are going to be needed at the position that she played, which we needed her back to the basket, we needed a little bit more consistency, and it kind of clicked around Christmas, and then she just went for it and used that kind of disappointment of which she wasn't maybe playing as much as she'd like and she wasn't quite as consistent.

Then it kind of clicked for her. When it clicked, boy, she went gangbusters. She's just a great young woman, and it was fun to see that growth. She had a great summer.

I do think she can be one of the great ones. She's a hybrid; she faces a little bit more. She's a little bit loose in the post. I don't mind her to use like a quick dribble if she's got a spinning one and in because she's fast. So I'm really excited to see what she can do now that she has this confidence.

But she had a heck of a summer. I'm really excited about her. And she can be a great mentor to Layla Hays.

Q. I have a question about your point guard position. We've talked about it before. You look back over the last decade, decade and a half and you know the names. Generally they're your primary scorers, and if they're not, they're still right up there in the scoring every single game. Chit-Chat is a little different. The first part of the question, what has it been like working with a different type of point guard that maybe isn't that primary scorer? And the second part of it, what kind of scoring do you expect from her this season or what kind of role do you want her to take?

JAN JENSEN: That's a great question because it's really different. She's really great in a whole different way, but she's -- from Sam Logic to Kathleen Doyle to Caitlin Clark to Lucy Olsen, you can see just the vocal leadership of those personalities. When you meet with Chit-Chat today, she is as sweet as they come and quiet.

Her name, ironically they call her Chit-Chat, but it's because she's quiet. So we're working on Hannah and Chat with that. But she's a really fast explosive, definitely pass first. Pass first capital letters on all of it, and she's got a beautiful floater because she's had to. She's got a really pretty three, and it's deep.

But she is so generous. So I'm trying to get the balance of

her to go ahead and force a shot here or there. Yes, I never had to tell that to Caitlin Clark. Caitlin was just going to take it.

That's been fun. But she's fast. She can handle the ball. She's really great on defense. She gives us a lot of different things. But we're just missing a little bit of that really more of a presence at the point guard with the voice.

But we just have to do it a little differently because that's going to be a work in progress for her. She gives us so much else. Kylie is kind of picking that up, and then we're getting Hannah being a little bit more vocal. But that's the trickiest part, is she's just a little bit more quiet.

But those of us who have covered us, Kamille Wahlin; she was a really great guard; Kristi Smith; they were a little bit more quiet. That's what's fun. They have a lot of other strengths; it just may not be that one.

If I get her to score a little bit more, she can score at every level, and it's fun to watch because she's just so little and fast. I think you'll enjoy watching her.

Q. Building off that, we saw last year with Lucy that there was definitely some time it took for the balance of being a centerpiece in the offense, but also being new and trying to come into a new culture that's very established and all that. In that same vein with Chit-Chat, what has been that balance and those conversations like of saying, hey, we know you're new, we know you're figuring everything out, but we need a lot from you this year?

JAN JENSEN: Yeah, I think that's the interesting thing. If Chit-Chat would have been in the same system that she was in as a sophomore, we'd probably have been talking a lot with Ava Heiden. She would have just picked up.

But now when a point guard has to come and learn everything and lead, it's the most challenging because she wants to get it right and she needs to get it right because she's the quarterback. So she's kind of calling the wrong plays, all heck happens.

So patience with her, I think that's my word is, like, they're just used to excelling at this level and they're high achievers, so the balance of pushing them and critiquing them is interesting because they just don't want to make mistakes.

When you're playing tighter you can't really keep growing as much, so with Chit-Chat I'm keeping her a little loose and telling her it is okay to make mistakes.

We're getting more and more comfortable in our offensive sets, but I think what's going to be fun is we're going to see some growth, or we need to. I think when we get two months from now, I just told my staff, it's going to be really, I think, hopefully really amazing to see a lot of the spurts because you typically in the summer, you're like, yeah, everything is great, and then you get to the fall and it's pretty good and you hit this time when you're not playing anybody else, and it's just like, everybody is like, oh, it seems a little tough sledding. But their attitudes are fantastic. It's just sometimes I've got to keep them built up because they're used to knowing everything.

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