

# University of Iowa Wrestling Media Conference

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## Coach Clarissa Chun

### Women's Wrestling Press Conference



CLARISSA CHUN: Thanks for coming. Really just a historic moment right now, and our program and our team are very excited to be able to represent the Hawkeyes and the black and gold. It's a moment that thousands and millions of girls across the world have waited for, a moment like this, an opportunity to be able to go to the University of Iowa, become a Hawkeye, get a great education, and be able to represent on the wrestling mat as a female athlete.

We're very excited. It's been a year and a half or so since I first started, and it's been a journey trying to get this going.

I work with an awesome, awesome staff, great people that help me along the way.

Couldn't be more grateful for the team that we have built together, and we're so excited to be able to have our first duel in Carver Hawkeye Arena. No better place to host a wrestling event, let alone a women's wrestling event.

I'll also say we're so grateful for the opportunities that we've stepped into. We know that the Goschke wrestling training facility is being built, and, wow, we feel fortunate and lucky that we get to be in a room where greats have come through in the Dan Gable wrestling complex, legends of the sport in wrestling, and that our women get to step into a brand new facility next year is truly something special, and we just really want to share the fact that we're so grateful for every opportunity we get being here at the University of Iowa.

**Q. When you think about when you first joined the program, started recruiting your first athletes to now looking at where you have a schedule, you have a pretty full roster, can you talk about that experience of how that's been, just building the foundations of the program?**

CLARISSA CHUN: Yeah, like I said, it's been a journey. There's moments where it felt like things needed to go quickly, but realizing I need to slow it down at times to make sure we're doing the right things to move the program in the right direction.

We as a program feel like we're shouldering a lot of responsibility as far as how we go about making sure we're understanding all the rules and compliances for a D-I program.

We understand there's going to be a lot -- asked a lot of questions - poor Matt and compliance, Dave - you know, it's questions daily as far as making sure we're doing the right things and building the program in the right way.

Like I said earlier, we have a great team of people behind the scenes that make sure that we're here to set our team up for success.

With building the program, it was how much do we start with, how many student-athletes do we start with. We have 10 weight classes; how much is too much, how much is not enough type of thing. That was one of the, I would say, things to work through as far as what that number is as we know that we're building the program over the course of four or five years and what does that look like and beyond.

Obviously, Kylie Welker, our first recruit, super excited to have brought her in to become a Hawkeye. She's a U-20 world champion, U-23 world bronze medalist, and she was a runner-up at Olympic trials. We have such great women that have followed her since then as far as being able to and wanting to become a Hawkeye, as well.

I think the women here that are here know and understand that no one person is bigger than the next, and the fact that they want to push each other to be better. So that way they can reach their goals of becoming a college national champion but also beyond to world and Olympic stages.

**Q. Was it difficult to narrow down who to recruit when so many people were interested in coming to Iowa?**

CLARISSA CHUN: Yes. It's hard. I think those are the pieces that we as the coaching staff are still continuing to learn and grow in that space as far as recruiting, because there are so many great women across the country. They're very ambitious, whether in the classroom or on the wrestling mat.

This is why more Division I programs should start a women's wrestling program at their institution, because

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there's a lot out there, and the sport continues to grow at a fast rate.

I just read an article yesterday about the NCAA working towards that championship status, and it could be a possibility by the 2025-26 season, with meeting minimum requirements of how many institutions and schools and whatnot.

**Q. How are you managing expectations with the team? I think a lot of people are expecting Iowa had a women wrestle team. Going to be the best one in the country.**

CLARISSA CHUN: Yeah, expectations, you know, wearing that Tigerhawk on your chest, fighting for Iowa, expectations are high. I think we put that all on ourselves in the sense of we want to do our best. At the end of the day, we work every day to be our best no matter the outcome.

The reality is every opposing team is going to want to take down a Hawkeye. No different than the men's wrestling program. You're either for Iowa or not, right?

So, our women are up for that challenge in the sense of every day we work, and they continue to impress me day in and day out in the sense of how they do business on the mat and off the mat, in the classroom.

So that's really throughout the whole year and a half, it is about what does your best look like today. How can we bring out your best so when we are out there, we just take care of what's in front of us.

**Q. Obviously you've talked about building your own program here. Representing this University and this wrestling program, do you see this program as kind of a catalyst to help grow women's wrestling at the collegiate level?**

CLARISSA CHUN: Absolutely. I feel like it's partly my why, you know, is to help grow the sport of women's wrestling. It's every reason why we as a coaching staff, as a program, institution, university, why we need to do it right.

Some people might try to look for, oh, where did they trip up? What is the example of how are they doing it? Is it possible or what does it look like to start a women's wrestling program at the D-I level.

Like I said earlier, I take on this responsibility. I take on this challenge. We as a program take on this challenge, and we know that we want to represent women's wrestling in the right way.

**Q. Just coming into this program, usually at the**

**college level or any sport, usually the coach comes in, someone has been around the program, show kid around campus. How has it been seeing leaders emerge when you have a group of players come in and someone has to rise up and be that type of leader. You mentioned Kylie.**

CLARISSA CHUN: It's a great point that you bring up. I believe that first year, the first 15, we all didn't have anyone really that has walked the hallways or lived in Peterson Dorms or whatnot. So really, we all had to just figure it out along the way, that type of thing.

And so, there were moments where some stepped up as leaders last year, but I feel like this year you can see it more because now that they've been here for a year and we have freshmen and transfers that have come in. You can really see others emerge as leaders in their own way.

We still continue to challenge all of them that they can -- they all have the opportunity to lead. If everyone on our program can live to the standards of what our program is about, then everyone is the leader, right?

Doesn't have to be just one person or two people. So that was interesting to see who was going to emerge or who is going to step up at different times to become that leader.

**Q. This season being on social media, talking with you, the mantra for you this year is "for her." Talk about your team's buy-in to that, and also for yourself when you're going forward, who is that "her" for you?**

CLARISSA CHUN: Yeah, early on in the school year last year our whole team got to see here in Carver a beautiful documentary of Dr. Christine Grant, and it being the 50th year of Title IX, it really hit why and how we even got here. For that, it's the gratitude for her. Not necessarily for Dr. Christine Grant. She's a big part of that, but for her meaning it could be for him, too.

For her, for all the people that paved the way, that were the trailblazers in our sport for Title IX, for the opportunities that our women have here today, for administration, everyone at the University of Iowa that made this possible for our program, to be here at University of Iowa, for her meaning the people we work and stand by day in and day out as a program, as a team.

There will be days where it's hard and we're going to like lean on our teammates that are standing with us. That's going to help us push us forward. It's for her, the next generation behind them, right? Young girls in the arena, seeing them in the middle of Carver, being that role model for her.



For them it's a good reminder of how to represent themselves and as a program when we can lead with gratitude and know that there is a bigger why than themselves.

**Q. You know you guys haven't had your first meet. Kind of the cart before the horse a little bit. I saw you at the crossovers on Sunday. Did that get your wheels turning a little bit that, hey, we would like to be out here someday, too?**

CLARISSA CHUN: Oh, yeah, that would be awesome. Like just thinking like, wow, that is such a cool event. 55,000 for a women's event is amazing. Like I've never seen anything like it in person. We had some Ukrainians in town this past week and they got to go to the game, and they've never -- like it's not anything that that's happening on a regular basis. That would be awesome to have that many people watching women's wrestling. I might be biased, but I think it's one of the best sports in the world.

**Q. Has it set in that you're now, as you're doing all this work to set up the program that now you're a couple weeks way from starting competition?**

CLARISSA CHUN: Yeah, every day. Tomorrow we have wrestle-offs and in less than two weeks, we go to East Stroudsburg and Princeton Open. It's coming fast. I'm excited.

**Q. How do you go about the process of setting a schedule knowing the goals you have for this program in the initial season?**

CLARISSA CHUN: Women's wrestling is still a place where -- I don't know if you saw the schedule -- but there are a lot more opens than dual meets. If there is a dual meet, it's typically a dual tournament style.

As women's wrestlers, we wrestle freestyle, so because of the rules in itself, the wrestling can tend to go faster than a folkstyle men's, men's collegiate match, which is why our first home dual is a quad.

A match could last three to six minutes or 10 seconds to six minutes. It varies because of the way the rules are. A match could end quickly if one opponent scores 10 points over another.

So it is open and dual tournament heavy. The good thing is it gives a lot more of our women the opportunity to compete, right? To have the opportunity to go to one out east and one out west and everything else is pretty close to home, which is nice.

There are over 160 women's wrestling programs at the collegiate level. What teams do we get out to and dual in our first year? That's the challenge. That's still something we continue to figure out, it being the first. Let's see how this works out and assess what went well and what would we change differently.

It's always a learning process in everything we do. Hopefully you guys like the schedule. We have a few at home, so that's exciting to be at home and have our women in front of our fans and hopefully they come out.

**Q. What affect do you think training with the Ukrainian team is going to have on the Iowa Hawkeyes?**

CLARISSA CHUN: The Ukrainians are leaving today. They were here for 10 days. It was a great opportunity for our young women. We shared the room with world champions and medalists in that room. Some of our student-athletes got it taken to them, which is not all bad. They got a good feel of what it feels like to be at that level, and then we learned a lot together.

It wasn't all just scraping and live matches. It was sharing technique, sharing stories of what life is like in Ukraine in this moment.

I feel like having the Ukrainians come in is bigger than the sport of wrestling. Wrestling is what brings us together, but I always like talk about wrestling is a vehicle of where you wanting to go in life and it helps build you as a person.

But it's not everything, right? There is more to life than just wrestling. It's the relationships you get to build and create with people all across the country and world.

They come in and bring a broader perspective of life, of why they are traveling abroad to train. In their situation in Ukraine, it's not safe to be training in Ukraine currently, so it was a great, great opportunity for Ukraine to come in.

**Q. Who has been the most improved on the mat since you have been here?**

CLARISSA CHUN: It's a good question. The most improved on the mat, that's hard. Hopefully all of them. Hopefully they all grew in some way. Most improved, what sticks out for me I would say is a Bella Mir. When she came in, she was No. 6 in the country at U20, and she made the U20 World Team this year and took fifth at world and she was sick and was in the medal contention.

I would say probably her; she's very coachable. It's like playing a video game. You tell her what to do, she does it

type of thing. At the World Championships, it was a question to her of asking her what she thought the difference was from being six in the country to fifth in the world.

She did say having a team of women behind her. She attributed making that world team because she had a team behind her, a team that believes in her. Sometimes that's what is so powerful about sport and having a team behind you, is sometimes the individual might be struggling with belief in themselves, but if they see others believe in them that can push them forward, right?

For her it was having at that team and then also alongside that, being able to fully focus on the sport of wrestling. Her background was MMA so they had a lot of different disciplines to train in.

That's a hard one. I hate singling out one person, but result-wise I would say her.

**Q. What has Marlynn Deede added to this room?**

CLARISSA CHUN: Marlynn Deede brings not only experience but maturity to our room, to our program. She came from Augsburg when Augsburg started up, right? She's now part of two programs that are startups. She was at Augsburg when it first started from the beginning, and there were different challenges throughout her years there and with that said, it was a difficult decision for her to want to transfer.

She felt like she -- because she was one of the first at Augsburg or was the first, she felt a responsibility to see it through for her entire collegiate career. It wasn't an easy decision for her to want to transfer, but she also felt she wanted to give herself a different opportunity to do something special here in the room here.

That's what she brings, is experience, maturity, and leadership in her way as well.

**Q. You have a number of extremely talented freshmen on this roster coming in that were highly recruited. How many are you expecting this season to be able to contribute right out of the gate?**

CLARISSA CHUN: I am trying to think through this one. Yeah, we have extremely talented freshmen. I want them to compete their best as far as I don't have -- like, yes, we want to win everything, be college national champions. We understand that every day we're learning and growing, and when they step out, I really truly just want them to be at their best.

Expectations, you know, that's hard. Yes, for them to win. I think, yeah, that's a hard question to answer, sorry. Oh, my gosh.

**Q. I guess someone like Lilly Luft, what do you see from her in particular?**

CLARISSA CHUN: Lilly, she's tough as nails and gritty. She goes hard. So she won't back down from anything or anyone which is awesome. Like everything else, we want to keep nurturing that piece she has and still work with other elements of it. There is still room for growth. That's the great thing. There is always room for growth for each and every one of our student-athletes here.

That's the scary part. You have the heart, the drive, the grit, sometimes those are the harder things to pull out. Some more than others. I like helping shape her as how she's going to present herself on the mat, so.

**Q. You talked about those freshmen coming in. How big of a deal will wrestle-offs be?**

CLARISSA CHUN: We told all of our women that wrestle-offs do not mean you're going to be the starter. It's notifications for us as coaching staff to see the process. For them to go through the process. Some are coming off injuries from last year.

This is an opportunity to get their process in place whether it's their weight descent, because we see them daily in the sense of how are they managing their weight leading up to the wrestle-offs. What is the refueling like, warm up like, what are the little things that go through their mind as they're preparing to step out on the mat for a wrestle-off. It's competition, it's not competition in Carver, it's not competition at East Stroudsburg or Princeton Open, anything like that. It's competition in the wrestling room, in the practice room.

To what level can they rise with this in that environment, like where it's the place you're training day-in and day-out. How do you create that shift of I'm competing for an opportunity to have a spot. Doesn't mean I get the spot, but it's a lot of learning pieces to have a wrestle-off for the individual and for coaches. That's why we are having a wrestle-off.

**Q. So as far as simulating an event is it going to be scratch weight and everything else?**

CLARISSA CHUN: No, we are giving a weight allowance because we are two weeks from the first competition. We are having an official come in because we don't want to officiate that. We are going to have an official come in and

officiate the matches, so it's going to be treated as such in that way.

**Q. The donation drive that you and the women's wrestling program and volleyball did together, how did that go?**

CLARISSA CHUN: I think it went well. I don't know the outcome of that. A lot of it was awareness of what is going on in Maui and how we can best help the community of Lahaina.

It was awesome that volleyball connected with women's wrestling to do the drive whether it's the food drive or the toys and clothing drive.

It meant a lot to us because we have one of our own, Nanea, that went to Lahaina Luna High School and has a big connection for the wrestling community in Lahaina. It's hard.

One of the young wrestlers that is in high school currently just had an opportunity to go back to her apartment just this week -- yesterday or the day before -- and that is hard. I can't even imagine what her and her family and the whole community of Lahaina is going through. Having a drive can help feed the people on Lahaina or provide clothes or have young kids be able to play in sport again. I don't know, but I would love it to be ongoing.

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