

University of Iowa Women's Wrestling Media Conference

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Coach Clarissa Chun

Women's Wrestling Press Conference



CLARISSA CHUN: All right, good morning and thank you for coming this morning. I'm excited for the season. We have like 18 days until our very first competition of the season, so it's here.

We're really excited. We have nine returning All-Americans, four of which are defending national champions. We have got seven freshmen and four transfers that have been great additions to the team.

We've been so grateful for the opportunity that we get to train every day in the brand new Goschke Wrestling Training Center.

It's been nothing short of amazing. It's a top notch facility, the best in the world. Yeah, our women enjoy it. I enjoy it.

Q. You quickly established Iowa as kind of the premier program in the country winning a national title the first year. The basic question, what do you do for an encore?

CLARISSA CHUN: Well, you know, it's Iowa, right? I'm grateful, we're grateful that Iowa has women's wrestling.

And as an encore, how can we continue to get better and do the same. You know, I think nothing really changes in that regard. You know, I really try to have our women not think about the outcome. Yes, we want to win. That's definitely the goal. That's what we talk about, is winning those matches, national duals, national championships.

But at the end of the day, let's just get better at wrestling.

Q. Not every day you bring in an Olympic medalist. What has Kennedy added to the room and what was the process getting her here?

CLARISSA CHUN: She awesome. Like I said, it's Iowa. Her and her sister were the first to come on a recruiting trip. In the landscape of women's wrestling how it's an emerging sport, she went a different route for her first two years. She went to Arizona State. They don't have

collegiate women's wrestling.

So she did the club route, and she really wanted to be a part of a program, part of a women's team. She really liked watching what was going on here. So that process was like very -- I don't know, I wouldn't say easy, but it was easy in some regards.

She's been great. She's been part of the team and got to know new people on the team that maybe she didn't know. She's been teammates with a few of our women that are already on the team, Reese Larremendy and Ava Bayless, they came from Wyoming Seminary together.

So it's been great having her in the room.

Q. Last year one of the things I asked about was last year you come into the program and it's like you didn't have that person that had been in the program for four, five years. This is a brand new thing to be like, hey, this is where you go to do this or do that, have that leader in the room. Talked about last year needing that next leader. Last year it seemed like it was a collective effort from the group and that it was a tight knit and maybe wasn't one or two people. It was a collection. What does that do for your program when you have a collection of people that kind of lead the charge more or less, more of a unit, rather than one person?

CLARISSA CHUN: That's a great question, Eli. I think really the first group who are currently juniors have really embraced this opportunity, and now in their third year to lead our newcomers. We got 11 newcomers and they've done a great job wrapping their arms around the newcomers and bringing them along and showing them the way.

The things that they had to figure out and learn for themselves they're now being able to offer advice on tutors and who to reach out to and all the little things that I don't know about, you know, as being a student-athlete.

Yeah, I think that when you have more leaders that see themselves as not bigger than anyone else, it drives the whole program forward together and it's a nice thing to watch.

Q. Just on the flipside of that question, bunch of new

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freshmen coming in. I know a lot of them throughout the year, or talking with the coaching staff, a lot of them you put on a five-year plan. You're going to be here for a bit to go through that process. What have been your impressions of the freshmen so far and who has stood out?

CLARISSA CHUN: Oh, man, the freshmen are hungry. I definitely feel like they know our team, who the upperclassmen are or the sophomores and juniors. They knew that coming in and wanted to be a part of a program where iron sharpens iron. They wanted to be a part of the program regardless if they were the starter or not.

They weren't going to sit back. You know, they want to be the starter. So they want to challenge, knowing we've had six national champs and 12 All Americans at that time.

So it just levels up our room really, and just challenges each other on a daily basis.

Q. You were talking about the earlier recruits you got in and the new faces. What does that say about you and the culture you've already brought to Iowa just one year in?

CLARISSA CHUN: I think, you know, they want to be a part of something bigger than themselves. I thank the community and the fans and the supporters of the program, because our women do feel like they are fighting for something bigger.

And I think the new people, the transfers and the freshmen, want to be a part of that.

Q. Seem likes Lilly Luft was someone we saw a lot of improvement from last year. How have you seen her continue to improve since then?

CLARISSA CHUN: Oh, man, Lilly is great. She continues to improve because she wants to improve, right? She's a young woman that is eager to learn, to grow, whether it's technically, tactically, mentally, emotionally, right, just the conversations.

She's just going to continue to get better. She's now in a room getting training with Macey Kilty on a consistent basis. When you get an opportunity to wrestle with a silver medalist you have no choice but to learn and grow.

Q. You guys overcame a lot of serious and significant injuries during and before last season. How is the overall health of the roster entering this year, and anybody you expect to be limited or out as you start the season in a couple weeks?

CLARISSA CHUN: So far, good, right, as far as good can be with injuries in our sport. We unfortunately won't have Nyla Valencia again this year. She suffered an injury this summer at a training camp training for U20 Pan-Am.

And Haley Ward is out this year as well. She got injured at national championships this last year.

Overall, our team is ready to go and we're excited.

Q. Last year the times you got to be at Hawkeye, I mean, so many fans for you. I see you getting honored on the football field. How much have you felt the support from the fan base and the university? A lot of places a first year program, first year women's wrestling wouldn't get that support.

CLARISSA CHUN: Best in the world. That's all I have to say. The fans are amazing. I don't know any other place where over 8,000 people come to watch women's wrestling at our first home duel meet, or a quad. That was special.

I continue to hope that people will still come out and continue to support our women. There is a lot of people who didn't know what they're watching in freestyle wrestling, and it was a great opportunity for them to like see our women compete at an international rules, like different than the men, right?

So they're watching -- having a different experience than a men's duel. Yeah, I think the fans are the greatest right here at Iowa.

Q. What is the status right now of women's wrestling nationally? Did it matter if there is a DI or DII or NAIA next to their name?

CLARISSA CHUN: I think -- I don't know if like you're saying if it doesn't really matter if there is a DI, DII, DIII next to the name of the institution are you saying?

Q. Yeah.

CLARISSA CHUN: Yeah, I think it just depends on the individual and what you're looking for. I think personally it matters for how the sport is growing. I would like to see more DI programs. I would like to see more DI programs at the Power 5 or Power 4 conferences, whatever we are saying this days, I'm not sure.

Really just opportunity. If you meet our women, they are so grateful for the opportunity they get to be able to get a prestigious education and high level training and the support from the community at this level.

It's like major differences between DI, I came from an NAIA school. It does matter. I would love to see more DI Power 5 conferences adding women's wrestling. There is a lot of high level wrestlers out there across the country.

Now with possible roster caps, you know, they're going to want to go somewhere where they can get a great education and compete at the highest levels.

Q. You guys set a unique experience of bringing the Ukrainian women's national team this time last year. What did you like about how that experience prepared your team for the season, and have you tried replicate that this year without the benefit of having the Ukrainians here with you guys?

CLARISSA CHUN: Yeah, it was awesome having the Ukrainian people here. On that team, one of them eventually became an Olympic bronze medalist and one made it to the bronze medal round. So that high level, right? That opportunity that our women get to get their hands-on. We don't have to travel overseas to get those international feels.

It's the relationships we build more importantly, right? That's the thing that I enjoyed about wrestling the most: meeting people from all over the country, all over the world, and building relationships and understanding each other, right? Different cultures, Ukrainian, what they're going through. You know, it wasn't easy for them, the Ukrainian team to be here, but they were really grateful to be here.

What I mean was obviously what's going on back home is the hard part during their time trying to figure out their training plan leading into the Olympics. I was grateful that they were able to come and stop here in Iowa City and train with our team.

Right now we actually have a Canadian team here training with us this week. Coach Tonya Verbeek, her partner coaches at Brock University and it's been great so far having them in the room. They've got a few people training for U23 Worlds and non-Olympic World Championships, just like we have a few on our team training for that practice.

So it's a great opportunity to collaborate and work together and push each other to get better.

At the end of the day it's about those experiences and working through those different challenges and feels.

Q. What have you seen where you have Reese coming back as a national champion and now Macey coming

in as well, and Ella up there as well?

CLARISSA CHUN: Yeah, no, it's been great. You know, like this is the last year we can have 15 at college nationals, and honestly it's been great. You know, when Reese was training for the U20 Worlds, Macey and Ella were there in individual practices to help Reese get better or get ready for the U20 World Championships.

So it's been great. It's not easy, you know. Like how do you continue to elevate the bar is what it is. How do you raise that bar within the room and still keep making sure that we're still on one team, right?

They've been great. They've been working well together and I'm excited for the growth of both of them.

Q. One the freshman coming in this year, Karlee Brooks, had a really good summer in some the international and national training tournaments. What have you seen from her since she has been on campus and what do you like about her as a wrestler?

CLARISSA CHUN: Oh, she's fun, you know. Like just her athleticism and agility. She has a different style that is different than a lot on our team, the way she moves, the way she competes.

Yeah, no, she's been great for our middleweights, lighter middleweights as far as just getting that in our room. That's an area I feel like we can continue to develop those weight classes, and she brings a lot to fill in for that weight class.

Q. You mentioned U23s and non-Olympic Worlds coming up. What have you seen from the trio of athletes you'll take over there in a couple week, and specifically Kylie who made a debut on the senior level early and now gets a chance to go back this year at 72 kilos?

CLARISSA CHUN: Yeah, I feel like Kylie is hungry. Her goal was Olympics and fell short of that. She's hungry and eager to take this opportunity at U23s.

Macey Kilty, you know, it's her last opportunity at a U23 World gold medal. She took second last year. So that's on her mission, right, to go get that -- be on the top of the podium.

For Skye Raelin, great experience for her. She represented Team USA this summer at U23 Pan-Ams, and having another opportunity to go and compete and get after this at the world level.

So excited for all three of them. Yeah, it's nice to have Hawkeyes in three of the ten weight classes at the U23 World.

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