

Rutgers University Football Media Conference

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Piscataway, New Jersey, USA

IV William Tate

Keli Zinn

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Good morning, everyone and welcome to today's press conference to announce the next Director of Athletics for Rutgers University, Keli Zinn.

Rutgers University President Tate will provide an opening statement, followed by remarks from Keli Zinn.

We will then open the floor for questions. If you wish to ask a question, please wait for one of the two microphones in the room to get to you. Please identify yourself by name and affiliation before asking your question.

Following the Q&A session, we'll have a brief photo op with president state and Keli Zinn.

At this time, please welcome Rutgers University President, William Tate IV.

KELI ZINN: Thank you all for being here. I'd also like to thank the Board of governors and our chair for supporting this hire. Hollis, as well. Great that you're here. I appreciate you. You're a legend and your support in this matter has been really my great honor. So thank you so much.

I'd also like to take an opportunity to thank Matt for agreeing to serve as interim athletic director. You're one of the first people I met here, and you're really a great steward of this institution. Greatly appreciate you.

Universities and their athletic departments are in many respects an archaeological dig layered with priorities, policy, personnel, players and performers and patrons. The person that builds the house of possibility at this site of competitors is the director of intercollegiate athletics. They must be a visionary, courageous, tough, and decisive in a fashion that supports the highest standard of competitive output, while understanding they are a torchbearer of ideals of integrity and academic excellence. The task requires the diplomacy of an ambassador and the operational discipline of a general.



In our next athletic director, we have a leader that possesses these qualities and who can stand firmly on the arc logical dig of Rutgers past, honor it, and push us to new heights. Keli Zinn is that leader. At every stop in her career she has translated vision into results. She helped West Virginia University navigate a major conference transition while overseeing one of the country's power conference universities. She led multimillion dollar facilities upgrades at that institution.

At LSU, she built championship-level alignment across compliance, health and wellness and daily operations all in service of sustained competitive success. She's nationally known for her sharp strategic instincts, her steady hand under pressure, and her unwavering commitment to student athletes. Keli brings to Rutgers what we call "the edge": A mindset rooted in preparation, purpose and performance. She's ready to unearth the best of who we are and elevate it. That's what leaders do on archaeological digs. They interpret the past to shape the future.

Rutgers family, please join me in thanking her husband, Nate, for being part of this journey, and now it is my great honor to introduce the director of intercollegiate athletics at Rutgers University, Keli Zinn.

KELI ZINN: Good morning, and thank you all for being here. What just an incredible reception we've received here over really the past 48 hours, right. I know it was just official but obviously since we left here a few days ago, it's just been overwhelming in the best of ways, and so thankful for all of you who have contributed to that.

Before I share some thoughts on the opportunities ahead of us, I do want to thank President Tate for entrusting me with this incredible responsibility to lead Rutgers athletics. As many of you have already seen, Dr. Tate's extraordinary leadership and commitment to excellence is a significant reason why we are here, and I look forward to working with him and other campus leaders to lift up Rutgers athletics, the university and our community.

Anyone who follows college sports right now knows that we are experiencing an unprecedented level of uncertainty. At



a time when many universities find themselves at a turning point, I can assure you that the most important component to successfully navigating the current and future landscape is alignment.

Among the many reasons I'm thrilled to join the Rutgers family is the certainty I have that Rutgers is aligned. Dr. Tate and I are in complete alignment and share a sincere belief in what can be accomplished in the weeks, months and years ahead. There is incredible potential here and you will see us working lockstep to realize that potential. Another key piece of alignment is with our board chair, Amy Towers, our board athletics chair, Hollis Copeland, and the entire board of governors who I had the opportunity to visit with virtually here this morning. The board has demonstrated its sincere passion for and commitment to the success of Rutgers Athletics and I am grateful for their support and belief in me.

Success is rarely accomplished alone. I have been blessed over the past 25 years to serve alongside so many incredible mentors who put me on their shoulders and positioned me for success, way too many to name today. But I do want to take a moment to express my gratitude to some people who have been particularly instrumental in both my personal and career growth.

To Brad Cox, Stan Wilcox, Debby Yao, Oliver Luck, Gordon Gee, Shane Lyons, and finally, Scott Woodward, who empowered me to lead and win at the highest level. I am so grateful to all of you.

Most importantly, I want to thank my family. My husband, Nathaniel has been my biggest supporter and sacrificed a lot of his own aspirations to allow me to ascend and stand before you today, as someone who shares an incredible passion for college sports. He is excited as I am to dive into the Rutgers community and make it our home.

You will quickly see that the qualities needed to elevate Rutgers to a championship level are in the fabric of who we are as people: Great, commitment, resilience, the list goes on. We will pour into this university with a focus on making it a place that people want to be a part of.

To my parents, Joe and Joyce, who have supported me every step of the way, all 3,595 miles from West Virginia to Rhode Island to Maryland back to West Virginia to Louisiana and now to New Jersey, you are a reminder of what hard work and an unwavering faith can accomplish, even in the midst of challenges and that example will continue to guide me in the days ahead.

Thank you for all you have sacrificed to help make this possible. And now, let's talk about the promising future

ahead.

My vision for Rutgers Athletics is quite simple. The process to get there in some cases will be complex and you'll hear more about those details in the future, but the vision is clear. We didn't come here to just compete. We came here to win, to win conference and national championships.

To do so, we will effectively recruit and retain elite talent. This includes student athletes, coaches, and staff. We will seek excellence in our performance and that mentality will drive us to punch above our weight and foster a culture of integrity, teamwork and discipline.

We will elevate our brand and the brand of our student athletes. Our entire department will support the academic mission of the institution. We will make a positive impact on the campus and in the community. We will show gratitude to all who support us, donors, alumni and fans. And we will build revenue and resources to successfully compete with the nation's finest.

Ultimately, our priorities will remain focused on what is best for Rutgers University and the Big Ten Conference in alignment with our values and what is best for the well-being and success for all students and all student athletes.

As I shared earlier, college athletics is in the midst of significant change and the constant threat of instability but there is opportunity in chaos and you will see us embrace that. We will capitalize on our strengths and strategically invest in our programs to, again, and you're going to continue to hear me saying this, attract the nation's elite talent.

To the entire Scarlet Knights community, our student athletes, the student body at-large, coaches, faculty members, staff, university leaders, letter winners, donors, fans and alumni, we can accomplish success like we've never seen before. If we do it together, with purpose, investing our energy and our belief in one another. It is then that the bell will ring.

Thank you, and go RU.

THE MODERATOR: So we're going to open the floor now for questions. Again just raise your hand and identify yourself by name and affiliation, please.

Q. Welcome to New Jersey.

KELI ZINN: Thank you so much, Steve.



Q. Curious, obviously Rutgers is not LSU when it comes to fund-raising and there's a big gap to bridge there. I'm curious about your plans, how you had planned to handle that and whether or not corporate will be a priority or private equity. What ways do you hope to bridge some of that gap?

KELI ZINN: Sure. Great question and obviously that's going to be a constant focal point. I actually had the opportunity just a moment ago to visit with Kimberly and talk about things with the foundation and everything that exists here at Rutgers.

And what you're going to see and what we talked a little bit about is both the importance of being able to elevate things in the commercial and corporate space relative to third-party name, image, and likeness.

It's absolutely a necessity and critical for our success but also to do so in a way where the traditional fund-raising side of things and the ability to raise capital and support the university capital projects can both thrive together, and there's a balance to that. But I think it starts with people working really well together to identify what the goals and expectations are to do so, and then it's us getting out and getting after it to do so.

You'll see us come together on that piece, and again, it's going to be a consistent focal point to raise our revenue to identify new revenue streams and to capitalize on those that already exist.

Q. You've worked in this region at times obviously in Maryland and in the Big East Conference. How do you plan to use that experience to build relationships early on in your tenure?

KELI ZINN: Obviously my time at the Big East was many years ago. But it was one of the things that I look back on so fondly, having the opportunity, particularly very young in my career, to roam the halls of Madison Square Garden and all the magic that exists within that city and that venue.

But my career has been one where you learn really quickly, it's relationship-driven, and the time and energy that it takes to put in that, but really, the company that you keep and how you pour into people, bringing awareness, communication, all those things, will certainly continue to guide me forward.

You'll find, and I noted it earlier, my husband and I are significantly invested in this. So you're going to see us visible in the community with stakeholders and putting in the time and energy to develop those relationships and navigate those areas.

Q. Your relationship with President Tate dating back to LSU, that synergy and that working relationship, how attractive did this position become when he became the president?

KELI ZINN: Oh, gosh, it was the biggest piece, right. And I say that because someone -- you know, President Tate and I spent three years together at LSU and accomplished a lot, won four National Championships, two of which had never taken place before our time there, and so it was a lot of celebration. When he departed, that was tough for me, and it was tough for a lot of people.

So to have the opportunity to come together with him again and have immediate chemistry is important. You heard me talk about the alignment side of things, but the relationship he and I have is one that's driven by our relentless pursuit of success and winning at the highest level. But the thing that I also value about him is the balance that he has both to academics and athletics, having the opportunity to see him work through that at LSU, he's as best as I've ever seen.

And this has been a goal of mine for -- many times, you'll hear my husband say, "She's been an assistant coach for 25 years. She was ready to be the head coach." And he gave me this opportunity. And that's something that I will never, ever take for granted, and I just thank him dearly for putting me up here and giving us this chance to come together again and accomplish excellence.

Q. A question of President Tate, curious how this process played out from your vantage point since I joined the university, and the structure, there was talk of a CEO leading the athletic department. Do you plan that with Keli or do you look at more of a traditional pro model?

WILLIAM TATE IV: The first question about process, obviously there was a process that was happening prior to my selection as President of Rutgers. I did everything I could to honor the process and actually worked because I think we have one of the most talented athletic administrators in the United States who has joined us.

Second question, related to the past engagement. One of the things that's extremely important with the athletic director and the president is trust, and you don't often get an opportunity to have already had it established, and I was open, quite frankly, to build that trust with any candidate we brought in, and to think through a potential model, potentially, that you're describing.

But what unfolded during the process was it was feasible to



find someone who had generated significant revenue at a very high level in that past job, and I think that matched the job description that was put out but simultaneously that person had tremendous operational expertise.

And so when you can marry the revenue generation component and the operation expertise at the highest level of power conferences, and you can get that person to actually join your team, that's called a big win.

And so for me, it just worked out in spectacular fashion because one of the things that Keli has great expertise in is not just the marketing of sports but also thinking about how to monetize that, and so I think we are in a very, very good place right now with that.

Q. When you think about the team you want to build around you, what type of people will you be looking to bring in who can carry out the vision for what you see, as you said, is the potential of this department?

KELI ZINN: Well, and you heard me say it earlier, right. I'm seeking elite talent. And one of the things that attracted me to this role was the fact that I have the opportunity to build an incredible team.

Already there are a few positions open, and so you'll see me go and seek the best from people who have the same approach and drive for the highest level of success, but those who are optimistic, those who can motivate and empower others and those who have made the world of college sports one of their deepest passions.

Q. I wanted to ask you more about facilities. There was talk prior to your hiring that there were going to be renovations and building some new things. Have you had a chance to check out the football stadium and the basketball arena and what are your overall thoughts on that?

KELI ZINN: Yeah, I had the opportunity to drive around. Today is the first day I'm actually able to get in the door and take a look at things. I saw a combination of things from the external side of it. Clearly the building we are all sitting in right now is fabulous. The Performance Center and some of those pieces look great.

I come from a background where -- and look, there's some beauty in the tradition and the years of wear and tear on great arenas and all the history that they hold. But keeping those upgraded and modern are extremely important.

And so I'm aware from the conversations I've had that there's some work to be done. Certainly my history allows me to take a really quick look at that but a thorough one to

make sure that we get that right and have a plan ahead to address facilities.

Because right now, when, again, our attracting talent, it's important that you have the resources to be able to do so, particularly in the new model with revenue sharing and then the ability for third-party NIL. But it still matters as to where they are going to develop and the brick and mortar that they live in each day, and so that's going to be a priority for me and my team to make sure we get that right.

Q. Obviously LSU was one of the leaders in the NIL space. How do you bring that success to a place like Rutgers where the coaches have not had the level of resources that their competitors have had?

KELI ZINN: Yeah, you are going to see us be really aggressive in that. I talked a little bit about that yesterday and even this morning; the fact that we sit directly in the media market that we are in and where that's at, that shouldn't just be a stat, right.

Instead, I think that's an incredible asset that we can absolutely capitalize on, young men and women coming into college sports today, they care about their brand, and there's a balance to that individual brand and a power in elevating that, but also doing it in a way where it also lifts that program as a whole.

And so we did a great job of that in my past life, and I have no doubt that we are going to be able to do the same thing here at Rutgers.

Q. Do you think Rutgers Athletics can be profitable, or at least sustainable?

KELI ZINN: You know, based upon the numbers I've seen, I do believe, and you'll learn, I think about anything is possible, right, when you put the right people together with the right plan and the ability to navigate that. Certainly that's not going to happen overnight.

But at minimum, we have to improve the financial footprint that exists here. On one hand, I look at the investment that's been made from this university and football coaches to keep athletics where it's at, and that's incredible. Extremely grateful for it; we all should be.

But it's important for me that the university, and particularly the academic side of things, do not see athletics as a burden, but instead they see it as a real value-add and part of what elevates the entire university and this community. We are going to work towards that, and obviously, again, I've been able to see it, and I know that's a task but one that we will absolutely be focused on starting on day one.



Q. For President Tate, we have not had an opportunity to meet you yet, either. Curious, you were very visible at LSU sporting events and reactive. What is your vision for Rutgers Athletics? What do you hope this program will become?

WILLIAM TATE IV: Win. (Laughter) it's not very complicated. You want to develop young people so that they have a set of experiences together and they not only grow academically but they grow developmentally so that they can go out and be successful winning in life, and simultaneously while they are developing that, that skill set, you want them to take their genius that they have, because you don't get to play sports at a place like Rutgers and not be an athletic genius.

They are in the 99.99999999 percentile of individuals who do the sport they are in. They may not actually win every single game but as individuals, from three star above, you're in the 99 percentile. So the realities are, they have demonstrated a genius. What we want to create are the support structures so that genius comes together collectively so they can win individually in life and win collectively on an athletic field, and I think that's possible here.

We're winning in research here. If you would have back in 1940 and said would Rutgers have 950 million research dollars, you would have said no. Somebody had to believe.

If you would have said Rutgers would be in the Top 15 of public universities in America back in 1940 -- I'm reading a history book now so that's my bench point, you would have said no. Somebody had to believe.

So I fundamentally believe that we can create a winning culture across the board in athletics where the student athletes are winning in life but collectively they are winning in competitions. So it's just about winning. It's just real simple for me. I don't make it complicated.

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