

Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Media Day

Tuesday, October 10, 2023

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Colorado Buffaloes

Coach JR Payne

Frida Formann

Quay Miller



Q. Big picture coming into this year, what excites you about this group and where are you at with the program?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, thank you for having me. Excited to be back as always with you guys. Yeah, we're really excited about our season. We had, as you mentioned, a great year last year, finished really strong. As the season goes on, you're trying to get better and better and better as the year goes on, and I definitely think we did that.

Then to be able to return almost everybody from last year's team that was sort of peaking at the right time, we've really tried to be intentional about starting where we finished. Obviously you're not in as good a shape and you have to put in a lot of offense and defensive schemes and stuff, but we really have been able to start at a much higher clip than we have in the past.

Q. I'm watching your football coach news conference, and I see Coach Prime mentioning you and women's basketball. What has the wave that is Coach Prime been like in your life, and can you get into a restaurant anymore because it seems like Boulder is the place to be?

JR PAYNE: Well, it's definitely a different vibe in Boulder. I love Coach Prime. I've already been asked about him six times today. I'm all in for anything that he's about. It's really refreshing for a coach, like myself that's been coaching for a long time, to hear someone come in with so much press and so much -- but talking about the right things, discipline, hard work, camaraderie, teamwork, all the things that we all know make a great ballclub. So yeah, his daughter is on our team. He's always trying to say, hey, can I come watch practice. He's been incredible, and the vibe in Boulder is incredible.

Q. You guys set a very high bar for yourselves and

then when you have to meet it and even for your team clear it, I'm sure that's your players' expectation, so how does that change the first few days of practice and how they talk to each other and how you talk to them?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, we like to use the phrase the standard is the standard, and the standard for us is striving to be excellent every day, not to go 10 for 10 from three or hold an opponent to zero shots or whatever. Our goal is just to be great.

So a lot of people will ask me, how far do you want to go this year, what are your team goals. Our goals is to be great today and then tomorrow we have the same goal.

I think our team is very veteran laden, we have a lot of upperclassmen that have played a lot of minutes, had a lot of success. Our veterans have done an incredible job of holding our program to that standard.

Q. You're heading into year eight. What have you learned in the past eight years that you can't wait to implement the most into a new season?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, great question. I think early on, we learned it's really important to be just true to who you are and what you want to be about. Sometimes it's tempting when you jump up to a conference like the Pac-12 Conference where everyone is so good, so well-coached, such great teams. It's tempting to try to adapt to be what you think everybody else is going to be in that league. So we've worked really hard to recruit the type of players that we want to be around, kids that are blue collar, hardworking, tough, do their job, be a great teammate, so that hasn't really changed for us, now that we've really locked into that in the past many years. We've created a culture where we are those things. Our locker room is great. We have great chemistry and things like that.

I think just maintaining sort of those same philosophical desires that we have in our team.

Q. You mentioned in your opening comments about starting at a high level this year, kind of picking up

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where you left off with most of your rotation back. But you also added two transfers. With having that core group already back from the Sweet 16 run, how did that influence or color what you were looking for in the transfer portal?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, I think when you know that most of your team is coming back and you really have a clear identity of who they are, there's no real question marks with most of those kids, we also knew exactly what we needed to add to our roster as far as where we think we needed to improve in order to get to the next level, so to speak, as far as going further than we did last year.

I think our staff did a great job of identifying a couple of needs and really targeting those with our two transfers. They fit absolutely what we needed. Maddie Nolan is a very experienced veteran. She's played a lot of minutes at a high level and is a knock-down shooter which is what we needed at that wing spot, and Sara-Rose Smith, sort of that versatile athlete, strong, tough, can rebound, can play several different positions, those were the two things we needed, and we were able to add that.

Q. When you talk about how your non-conference scheduling -- how you factored that into where you want to take this team this year, considering how tough that non-conference schedule looks.

JR PAYNE: Yeah, I think when you look at how tough our schedule is, that tells you how I feel about our team and our readiness to compete. We wanted to be challenged. We know this is the best conference in America this year for women's basketball. We knew that we needed to play great teams in our preseason to be prepared to compete in the Pac-12 Conference.

We did that. We talked to our veterans about some of the games that were put in front of us, and our veterans said absolutely, we want these games. So they wanted to be challenged in that way. We'll be prepared.

Q. There's some very high expectations for your team this year. Is there a certain amount of pressure that comes with that, and what are you and your team doing to tackle that?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, I would say nobody in the world has higher expectations of ourselves than we do. Like I said, our veterans do a great job of making sure that we're holding ourselves to the standard that we believe we're capable of.

Like you just mentioned, LSU opening night, that's obviously a very tall task, but our team wants that. They

want to be challenged. They want to be held to the highest standard, and we don't really feel any pressure. We just want to be great.

Q. Everybody back, really good situation. What is your greatest challenge to get this team to its best spot this year?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, I was just talking to our players on the flight yesterday, just saying every year of coaching there's a new challenge. You don't necessarily know what it's going to be every single year, but this year our biggest challenge has been that we have some obviously really veteran group, really talented, experience. We also have some really talented young players who just need time. They can't be expected as 18-year-old kids just getting to college to be on the same level as these 23-year-old fifth-year seniors.

So really trying to find that balance of getting those young guys up where they need to be but also making sure that the train is moving at a high clip. That's been our biggest challenge.

The great thing about our team, though, even though there's a big disparity in age for some of our players is we have great kids on our team. They are helping the young ones. The young ones are listening. They're coachable. So sort of finding that balance between those two groups has been our biggest challenge.

Q. I want to compliment you on speaking what you wanted into reality. I remember several years ago you told me what you wanted your team to look like, long, athletic, defensive minded, shoot the three, and you're there. Now I see that you've tweaked your coaching staff, as well. What about the addition of a Shelley Sheetz, those kind of changes that will help your team this season?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, I absolutely love our staff. Toriano, Alex and I have been together forever, so that's really been like a great foundation, not just for ourselves but for our players, to have that stability in our staff.

Being able to add Taelor Karr as our new assistant coach, she was a great player, played for Kellie Graves, as I did, so we're kind of all from the same tree, same mindset. That's been great.

Then adding Shelley Sheetz and Matt Hower to our coaching staff, both have been coaches and have a really great mind for the game.

Anytime you can have a Hall-of-Fame All-American coach



on your staff I think is great.

Q. I think about Jaylyn Sherrod and Quay Miller in particular getting some preseason accolades. Do you think they get the national attention and respect that maybe they deserve?

JR PAYNE: I do not. I don't think they do. But I also don't think they mind. They're just trying to be great. For example, Jaylyn said, let's have Frida come to media day this year. She's a great teammate. They're built that way, that they don't need to shine. They've earned the shine and they're going to continue to, the points and the rebounds and the steals and all those things are going to tally up in the stat sheet, but they don't necessarily care about that stuff, but they're definitely deserving.

Q. We talk so much about your program, but to me the key person we don't seem to talk enough about is Netty Vonleh and what her transfer into your program and the difference it made having an anchor in the middle that shoots close to 50 percent. What's been the difference?

JR PAYNE: Yeah, Netty has been transformational for our program. We had a lot of talent. We did not have an Aaronette Vonleh, and to see her from her freshman year to her sophomore year, to see the change in her game, in her confidence, in her just presence on the floor has been unbelievable to see. I think we'll expect really, really big things from net at this this year, and the sky is absolutely the limit. I think she could be the best center in America.

Q. A thought on your players Frida Formann and Quay Miller?

JR PAYNE: As the lights got brighter and the stage got bigger last year, Frida absolutely shined. She in some ways I would say carried us in the NCAA Tournament. She was unbelievable. She was reliable. She hit big shots. She was absolutely unafraid. Frida has been great since she arrived on campus. She was a great freshman, all through these first few years. She's even better now. It's really cool to see a player that's had such a great career so far to take it to another level. She's leading. She's talking. She's defending. She's going to have a great year.

Q. Frida and Quay, welcome to media day. How has it been going so far? We're happy to have you up here. You just heard Coach singing your praises, so many pieces returning from inside the locker room. For both of you, how does it feel coming into this season?

FRIDA FORMANN: It feels really great. I think we were

really excited to get back and practice this summer after the season we had, and we're returning so many people, so it just doesn't really feel that new. It feels like we're just starting from where we left off, and it's really cool.

Q. Quay, was it a tough decision to come back this year?

QUAY MILLER: I think I knew from where we stopped in Seattle that I was going to come back because I just felt that we could have went further. Coming back was just instant, like I just knew it was going to happen.

Q. With all the hype around boulder these days, how much does it mean to y'all to not only show up here in Vegas to represent your program but the school, as well?

QUAY MILLER: I think it's always a privilege for us to be able to showcase CU and the great talents that are there. I think Frida and I are just examples of what amazing athletes, student-athletes are at CU.

FRIDA FORMANN: Yeah, I think it's been really fun lately, all the attention that Boulder has had, obviously, and Boulder is just a great place, and CU is a great place, so it's nice to get that recognition. It's been fun on campus lately.

Q. For both of you, how have your expectations changed based on your season last year, and are you excited to open against LSU?

FRIDA FORMANN: I think as Coach JR said, we always have high expectations for ourselves, so I think this year we've kind of proved to ourselves that it's okay to have those expectations. We should. So yeah, I think we really want to win.

That first game against LSU is no different. We really want to go in and win that one and just show how great we are, and really excited about that.

QUAY MILLER: Yeah, I think our expectations are to just be better, be better in every aspect on the court, off the court, and I think that as we implement that into our practices, that's what we're going to bring to the LSU game, just being better than what we were last year.

Q. I want to know from both of you what you improved in your game, what extra tools have you put in your toolbox that we can look forward to talking about this season.

QUAY MILLER: I think one of my biggest things that I tried



to work on this year is just having confidence, especially throughout games where I'm not doing a whole lot of scoring, figuring out how to impact the game in other ways. I think that that's just been my biggest area that I've been working on this season.

FRIDA FORMANN: I think for me, same, like having confidence, and then I spent some time with my national team at home, and that always kind of makes me play a little bit outside of the skills I use here at CU. I played the point guard for Denmark against the Japanese national team, which was difficult because they do full-court pressure for 40 minutes.

I think that aspect, just being confident in other areas, knowing that I can do a lot of other things than shoot I think is really good for me.

Then just leadership skills. This year has really been a year where I wanted to emerge as a leader on this team after the season we had last year. So yeah.

Q. We were talking about Aaronette Vonleh and what she's brought to your team with Coach Payne. What was it like having her join the program?

QUAY MILLER: Yeah, having net at this is great. I think having her has been very resourceful. She just takes up so much space, and she's just a great finisher all around, and I think that when people are focusing on her, it's easier for me to get my shots off, and when people are focused on me, it's easier for her to get hers.

I think we just play a good roll off of each other.

Q. Frida, over the years it's gotten tougher for you to get open looks because at the top of every scouting report is don't give Frida any open looks. Do you have to work harder to get open, and what's that like knowing that you're at the top of that list every game?

FRIDA FORMANN: Yeah, I think it's really come down to just working on how to read screens, being able to shoot off the dribble to just practicing all my counters has been really helpful, and I think it's good. It expands my skill set.

Whenever you have to work on that, it's just like it puts some respect on your name that, okay, if they can't guard this, I'll have to work on the next because that makes me really dangerous.

Q. When you think about success, and we talk about you guys going to the Sweet 16 last year, 25 wins, the program has started to rise and rise. With success comes more pressure and more eyeballs and people

are coming for you. What will success look like this season? What would you say will define success for you both this season?

QUAY MILLER: I would say that our success would look like us being able to push through adversity, being able to bounce back through adversity, and just being able to learn from our mistakes in past games quickly. Not making the same repeated mistakes in the next game, and just growing maturely as we go throughout the season.

FRIDA FORMANN: Yeah, I think we want to win championships, and like Quay said, like we daily need to work on just being a steady team for a whole game, not having dropoffs, so that's really something that we need if we want to be a championship team.

Q. Quay, I think I was reading an article from a couple weeks ago that said you were at practice early working with some of the freshmen and the coaches walked in and you were like working out with people. You've changed so much since that freshman year. Talk about your maturity and how you feel about yourself that you're showing up a half hour early and working with freshmen.

QUAY MILLER: So I think that my maturity level has changed since my freshman year because I have grown to accept the leadership role that I've been thrown into because I've been the biggest person in the room oftentimes on teams and just in general settings.

I kind of shied away from not wanting to be the leader because I still make mistakes myself, so it's hard to be a leader when I'm still messing up. But learning how to adopt that and go and show people that I'm leading that you can learn through these trials and tribulations, it's just one of the things that I've accepted and learned how to make lessons out of them, and I think that's just been my biggest role instead of letting it be something to bring me down, using it as something to help me grow and help the next player grow, as well.

Q. Quay, tell me your favorite thing about Frida. Can be basketball related or not. Frida, same thing with Quay.

FRIDA FORMANN: Oh, Quay is just like an amazing person. Like whenever you look at her, you just want to smile. I think my favorite thing about Quay is just the way she can just light up a room. Quay is also never afraid to ask a question. She'll ask the person what you really want to know, and I think it's great that Quay doesn't really get nervous around that. She's very straightforward and just has a way with people.

QUAY MILLER: My favorite thing about Frida has been her growth and leadership and just how outspoken she was. I was talking to my dad earlier, like Frida is not afraid to press the issue, whether you're upper class man or a lower class man, she's coming at everybody the same way, so she can let people know, there's no dropoff. Everyone is expected of the same things, whether you're new or a veteran.

The way she just articulates herself, she doesn't beat around the bush. I don't know if that's because she's from Denmark, but she gets to the point and she's not scared because at the end of the day I think that she knows that we know that it's coming from a place of love, and she really just wants everyone to be their best selves.

With that, she has to give you tough love, and she'll equally give you the support and encouragement that you need, as well.

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