

Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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Rosemont, Illinois, USA

Men's Basketball Panel

Brad Underwood

Illinois

Dusty May

Michigan

Greg Gard

Wisconsin



of freshmen with a nice group of transfers and got some veterans in Kylan Boswell. We have a guy in Ty Rodgers back. Those guys are going to have to lead us early.

A very talented group. I like this group in terms of their ability, but building on chemistry and something that we're going to have to work on as we move forward.

THE MODERATOR: I want to dig in a little bit on each one of your teams.

Coach May, I'll start with you. I hinted at it in the introduction there. You are from this area. You went to Indiana. You were a student manager at IU under Bob Knight.

What does it mean to be back and coaching in the Big Ten, this league that I know you had followed closely growing up and certainly in your time in college?

DUSTY MAY: My earliest memories were watching Big Monday and Super Tuesday. Those were the only exceptions to my curfew where I could stay up late watching hoops.

I've been at Florida for nine years, so I was curious how it would feel to be back in the Midwest. Immediately after landing in Ann Arbor it just felt like I was home again. So I'm excited to go against such great coaches and storied programs.

We talked about before where every game is an event in the Big Ten.

THE MODERATOR: You go to Bloomington on February 8th. I don't want to get too far ahead. I know there's a lot of time between now and then. Have you thought at all about what it will be like to go out on that floor and coach against Indiana?

DUSTY MAY: Once I saw the guys that Coach Woodson was able to get this year and the team they've put together, I've tried not to think about that game.

Q. Fair enough. Brad, you guys played FAU, a wildly

THE MODERATOR: Great to have all three of the coaches of those programs with us. As I mentioned, we've got the two coaches that squared off in the Big Ten championship game last year.

I want to start with just an opening statement from each one of you. Just give us a big-picture thought on your team heading into the year. Greg, you can start us off. What should we expect from Wisconsin?

GREG GARD: I think the first thing is we've got some returners that have helped stabilize our core, so to speak, with Max Klesmit, Steve Crowl, and John Blackwell. Then we've added some pieces through the portal as well.

I like our group. I think we've got a lot of size. We've got a lot of depth, and it's been great competition so far in the first seven days of practice.

THE MODERATOR: Dusty, welcome to the Big Ten. Great to have you. Give us a sense of what we should expect from the Wolverines this year.

DUSTY MAY: It's great to be here. When you look at our roster, we were able to get guys out of the portal that come from winning programs. They've been well-coached.

Our freshmen have been a real pleasant surprise as well. We have a group that's fun to work with. We're big. We're skilled. We're a little bit different than all of our FAU teams. It's a great group.

THE MODERATOR: Brad.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Positional size and shooting. Two of the things we really tried to define in the portal. We lost a lot. There's no doubt about that. We've got a good mix



**entertaining game last year at Madison Square Garden.
Give Big Ten fans a little bit of a scouting report on what they should expect from a Dusty May coached team?**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Well, Dusty's FAU team was as tough as anybody could get. I mean, they were very, very tough-minded. They played fast. They were extremely skilled offensively. Great, great balance inside and outside. Obviously Vlad has made the transition to Michigan. He'll be one of the better centers, better bigs in the country as well as this league.

Extremely well-coached. You don't get to a Final Four without that. Very, very talented offensively.

They were a team that scored the ball in so many ways, but was so challenged by how tough they were, and I know Dusty is going to bring that to Michigan.

THE MODERATOR: Dusty, I think you'll be happy to know Marcus Domask is no longer on Illinois's team. Terrence Shannon, no longer on Illinois's team either, because I know they were awfully good. They took you guys to heights that you haven't seen in quite some time, Coach. I mentioned first time you guys made the Elite Eight. First time Illinois made it out of the first weekend since 2005. To get as far as you did, what did that mean for the program, really to put some of that stuff to rest and to say, hey, this is a program that can be right there on the next to last weekend competing in the deepest parts of the NCAA Tournament?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Yeah, and there's no doubt it was a step. We had a great team a few years ago. We were a 1 seed and got upset. I think that's the beauty of the tournament. I think it was more media-driven, the concerns, and fans maybe than I was.

I just felt like we have to keep getting back there. We had a great team last year in terms of character and toughness, and we were an old team. We hit the portal and got some veterans. That team had a maturity about it, but there's no doubt I thought we were a Final Four team that just happened to lose to UConn in the Elite Eight.

They were very, very good. I thought we were a team that had a chance, but no doubt it was great. We're not satisfied. The Elite Eight is a great step, but we've got two more we would like to play, and we've got to keep striving to get there.

THE MODERATOR: Greg, I want to talk to you a little bit about the perspective that you bring just because of the amount of time that you have spent in this league, not just

as the head coach at Wisconsin, but starting with Bo in 2001. When you got into the Big Ten, this was an 11-team league.

GREG GARD: Right. It's almost doubled.

THE MODERATOR: Now it's an 18-team league, yes. It's significantly different. First of all, how does it change your approach as a head coach when you are dealing with an 18-team league versus an 11-team league?

GREG GARD: I don't think the approach changes, so to speak, but understanding, like you mentioned, this is my 24th year in the league and to watch the evolution and the growth of it. I have kind of coined the term, there are no get well games.

No matter where you play, who you play, when you are playing them, you better lace them really tight, and that's what we've found, the parity across the league has grown immensely. There's been great battles whether you are at home or on the road.

There used to be places you could show up and make a couple of layups and you were going to get out okay, but now every single night is a battle. From that standpoint just approaching it one game at a time and as you grow and battle through the league, everybody is going to go through some ups and downs. Everybody is going to experience some good times and just who can persevere through that over a 20-game stretch.

THE MODERATOR: What do you attribute that to? Why do you think that the league has so many more competitive teams than maybe it did when you and Bo got there?

GREG GARD: We have to give credit to the Big Ten Network, right?

THE MODERATOR: That's not the first place I would have gone, but we'll take it.

GREG GARD: I think just how the league has expanded. Obviously the coaches and the players, the national scope of our league has grown. Now we're coast-to-coast. I think we're the most powerful league in the country.

So for all those things have added to it. And I don't think there's been one single element that's made the difference, but it has changed immensely since we started in 2001.

THE MODERATOR: I want to talk to you about your team and one thing that really stood out last year was you got a lot better offensively.

GREG GARD: Right.

THE MODERATOR: You're going to be new. You have a new point guard this year. Give us some insight into whether it's Freitag or Hunter or some combination or someone else? What can we expect out of that position? You felt like that was part of where you start to make a jump.

GREG GARD: I think we've increased the pace of play a little bit, and we've become more efficient. We've tweaked some things to evolve with how the game has changed, and we've recruited specifically to that shift and that change.

From a point guard position it could be -- you mentioned Daniel Freitag, a freshman, Camren Hunter who we got out of the portal, Kamari McGee, who is a returner for us that missed a fair amount of time last year with an injury and has played well. I've even used John Blackwell some at the point.

For us much like Brad said, positionally I don't get consumed with numbers whether you are a one or a two or a three. I like size. I like skill and depth. I think we've got all three.

THE MODERATOR: Brad, you have a ton of new faces. You only have one player back who averaged more than three points per game, and yet you guys are picked towards the very top of the league. We were talking about this on the schedule release day.

It almost seems like you enjoy kind of this putting together a new roster every year and fitting the pieces together. And then as we know, you're willing to adjust kind of how you play in midseason and figure out what works best for your team. What are the particular challenges and what do you like about having a new group every year?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I guess it goes back to my junior college upbringing where you have eight, ten new guys every year, and you have to figure it out and put those pieces together. I say this, and this sounds crazy, but I like to win. If we're doing something that starts that we don't like, we're going to not be afraid to change it.

I think that's one of the things that I feel very comfortable with is making those changes. We got a system last year where we were able to maximize Marcus as a power forward at Southern Illinois. Became our lead guard and found a way to play and be successful.

The basis has changed. We still want to play fast. We still want to play effective on the offensive glass. Just the little

tweaks here and there are what take place.

But this group is different, and we've gone -- we've been very, very specific in positional size who can shoot it, and those are things that we're continuing to look for to keep trying to find mismatches and advantages as easily as we can.

THE MODERATOR: Dusty, you were in the portal quite a bit. Obviously by necessity. I think that's kind of especially when you take over a program in this day and age, that's just what's going to happen. In terms of piecing your group together, kind of what were the priorities that you set out when you said, how am I going to assemble this team?

DUSTY MAY: Very similar to these guys. We were looking for positional size. We brought in great skill and a lot of size. We're going to play Danny Wolf at the 4, who is 7'; we'll have Sam Walters playing on the perimeter who is a 6'10" shooter, and our guards are all big.

We felt we needed a physical guard with good speed and positional size up front. We have great versatility. The line-ups are going to look a lot different game by game, but we're excited like Coach Underwood to put these pieces together.

THE MODERATOR: What does it mean to be able to have Wolf and Vlad on the court at the same time, to have two guys with that kind of size?

DUSTY MAY: Well, we should be able to control the glass much better, and we should be able to find matchups. Any time you have that type of size, you can play over the top with your passing, and they're able to stretch the floor as well. We'll be able to put four shooters on the court at all times.

Our guards can all make plays off the bounce and shoot it from deep. So we want to be a challenge to guard and also be able to protect the paint and take away the other team's threes.

THE MODERATOR: I want to leave you all with the same question, and you can kind of work your way down the line. I can start with you, Greg. I think one of the players who would really stand out in this category to me from where we sat last year was John Blackwell, a player who maybe people weren't necessarily talking a ton about in the preseason and ended up having a great year. Who is that player on your roster that people might not know a whole lot about right now, might not be getting headlines, but you think at the end of the year people could be talking about?

GREG GARD: I think Nolan Winter, a sophomore, who got

a little bit of time. Not as much as John got last year. Just watching freshmen go from freshmen to sophomores and the experience they can take from that handful of minutes they got as a freshman and how they use that in the offseason to improve their body, improve their body, their game.

Much like Dusty, I'm able to play two 7-footers together in Steve Crawl and Nolan Winter. For Nolan to take the jump he has, he still has a ways to go, but we really like what we see from him so far.

THE MODERATOR: Dusty.

DUSTY MAY: The guy Rubin Jones has been a pleasant surprise for us. Tre Donaldson out of Auburn. They've won a lot of basketball games and we're excited to see how they mesh together with the bigger guys up front.

Like I said, everyone we brought in from the portal came from a winning program, so it's on us to put them together and utilize them.

THE MODERATOR: Brad.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Ben Humrichous. Started at an NIAI school for three years. Went to Evansville. Been a huge and very pleasant surprise. Very, very gifted shooter.

I have a group of three freshmen that I'm very excited about to see their growth. They're probably the most talented freshmen that we've had on our campus. So we'll see. I think all those guys have an opportunity to really affect our play.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks a lot, guys.

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