

Big Ten Volleyball Media Days

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

Iowa Hawkeyes

Coach Jim Barnes

Claire Ammeraal

Chard'e Vanzandt

Press Conference



in understand the way we treat each other, the way we train, and just how we go each day. The coaches can only go so far in getting that across.

I've been coaching for a while. All the boxes are checked to make this a banner year. So it's been a great spring and even a better summer.

Q. Claire, year two in the program. How is this different? How do you approach your second year in the program and being a returner with so many other returners as well?

CLAIRE AMMERAAL: Yes, it's a little different. Preseason is kind of the same. You want to attack it. You have a bunch of new teammates and you want to get to know everybody first so you can gel on the court.

But the season is going to be hopefully a lot different. There was a bit of an injury last year, so it kind of shook my confidence a little bit. But now with our new team and everybody around me I feel even better than I have before going into it, and I'm so excited to see what we can accomplish as a team.

This year I feel like our team is so much more driven and determined, especially with our defense. I think that's one of our main points right now, and I'm so excited for everyone else to see it. Our blocking, we have a bunch of new transfer liberos and I think they're actually super humans.

You think the ball is about to touch the floor and you're already watching it and you're like, I'll do a setter dump; oh, I got them. Bam, Greta is there. It's just super exciting. This season already feels a lot different, and I'm excited to see how it goes.

Q. Chard'e, you've taken a most interesting path in your college volleyball career. Can you take us through how you went to all the different places and ended up where you are?

CHARD'E VANZANDT: Yeah, obviously starting out at JUCO, shout out to my JUCO, but it's been a journey

JIM BARNES: Good morning, everyone. First, thank you guys for being here. Thanks for what you do to help us build this great sport and supporting our players. You guys have a hand in really helping support our players, put them out on a platform to help project them out into this country. Thank you all for what you do.

Just really happy to be here with two seniors, Claire and Chard'e. They make up 10 returners that come back from this past season, 10 returners that you want to build a program around, just on and off the court kind of athletes you really want in the gym every day.

We back them up with five freshmen. Two of the freshmen are international players from Europe, and four transfers. We had a great spring putting that together. Just couldn't be more optimistic about the success we're going to have. I think there's going to be a record-breaking season for Iowa volleyball, and it's going to be led by these two seniors.

Our other senior, Mo, she's not here today. They only let me bring three. But she's our libero who I think is going to make a big splash also going into this year.

Grateful to have you guys here, and look forward to your questions.

Q. There are years where you didn't necessarily have 10 returners. How much of a luxury is it to have that continuity and that roster experience?

JIM BARNES: Yeah, it's everything when you're building a program. That's why I say I think it's going to be a very successful year and we're going to be able to do some real important things this season.

It's because these players, it means a lot to them. They're super driven. They've helped the players who have come



honestly and just being open minded through all of it. My goal was always to get here, and luckily they passed a new rule where if you played JUCO you get an extra year back.

So throughout the whole journey and every school, I always strived to get better, and it goes to the next level and I ended up here, and I'm truly blessed to be here.

Q. Chard'e, why did you choose Iowa for your final season? Why the Hawkeyes?

CHARD'E VANZANDT: Yeah, so it was really a no-brainer coming here. Obviously I love Coach Barnes. God-fearing man, a great man, and he's everything that a player could want in a coach. He's driven just like us, and it shows throughout our program. Just love the guy, and I'm excited to play at this level.

Like you said, you don't really get this opportunity coming from a JUCO, so it was a real no-brainer coming to Iowa, and we're ready to make some noise this year.

Q. For Claire, in the spring you mentioned a different energy and a better chemistry on the court. How has that progressed since the spring season, and how can it open up for the team -- what can open up for the team this season?

CLAIRE AMMERAAL: Yeah, I think our spring was amazing. I think we got along really well, but I think our summer is where we really set ourselves apart because it's player led. You can't have your coaches with you. I think our team did a great job of -- it's hard to try and establish any type of authority within a team.

You want to all be on the same level, and I think we did a good job of that. Everyone all has very good ideas and they all want to get better and they're very passionate about it. I think me and Chard'e worked together with it, with Mo, our other senior, and we tried to make it as collaborative as possible, and I think we did a great job of taking what we had in the spring, building upon it, and getting to the point where, like, we feel ready to go and preseason hasn't even hit.

Q. Jim, three or four transfers or back row players, and they came from Alabama, Miami, Syracuse. Why did you want to hit that position so hard in the portal, and what have you seen as a result of that infusion of talent?

JIM BARNES: Yeah, it was just a natural progression of what's opened up and what positions we needed and what they could bring to the team. The ball control aspect, the defense, like Claire is bringing up, and some of the

experience. We needed some experience at that position. We graduated a great experienced libero in Joy.

All of them stepped up, and all of them could be our libero. I think Mo really stepped up throughout the spring, was a lock-down serve receiver, which we knew she was a really good passer. We didn't realize she was a lock-down passer. So she's tremendous. Everybody we saw on film and watched were better in our gym. I think that was huge with infusing them.

And just a little bit of information. I don't think people know this, Claire, going into last year, that second weekend she had a very significant injury. I think Claire is one of the best setters in the league, in the country.

That really knocked her out of that whole season really. She was never back to that level. This spring she got back to it, and she's raring to go.

I think probably the most talented setter in the country. I know people think that might be crazy, but I've been doing this a long time. I think you're going to see something incredible out of that position.

And then Chard'e has been a middle her whole life. A lot of people don't know that as well. We converted her to left side, six row rotation. She did it this spring and converted like -- I don't think most people would see that happen so quickly.

It just shows you how driven and versatile she is and what she's going to bring. Both of them are so driven. It's going to be the heart of what pushes our team.

Q. I saw you quoted a little bit earlier this summer saying you felt like last year was that breakthrough roster and it was injuries that kind of took its toll. What is your expectation for this coming year, how invigorated you feel bolstering this roster, having a setter back for her second season and trying to get that breakthrough?

JIM BARNES: Yeah, I expect the best out of every player every single day, and if we get that, and I think we're going to have a record-breaking year.

I really think Iowa will have one of the best seasons it's ever had. All the boxes are checked for that to happen. Being able to do this for a while, you look for those different things that add up to wins, and we have that in spades. We have it in leadership. We have it in talent. We have it in depth. We have it in drive.

This team is more united than any team I've had here at



Iowa, and that's going to get them through those hard games. Because at Iowa you're going to play a lot of hard games and you've got to bounce back and you've got to be really resilient, and we work on that every day.

I can't wait to go to battle with them and start practice here around the corner. I think, again, it'll be something that will surprise a lot of people.

Q. You were 4-0 in five-set games last year.

JIM BARNES: Yeah.

Q. I wanted to follow up on what you said about Claire and being one of the best setters in the conference. What is it about her game that stands out so much to you and how she can continue to grow in this next season?

JIM BARNES: Yeah, that's the thing, is she stands out in a lot of different areas. She's just not a deliverer of the ball, which she does that very well. She's the most offensive setter I think in the country. So left handed, hit set over 50 miles an hour, and thinks she's a hitter. She wants to hit every ball.

We have to, like, pull the reigns back sometimes. But she's fierce. I don't think you'll find a more fierce setter, as well.

Then her setting IQ has gone to a different level, and I think sitting out has actually helped her see that and see how to be a better leader, how to be a better consistent player. Because that's the part -- like the talent is all there, just the consistency has all come together.

Last year she would have lit it up, but this year I think you'll see something special.

Q. Claire, especially you as such an offensive-minded setter, where that comes from, the craftiness and why that's fun for you to not just be a deliverer the ball?

CLAIRE AMMERAAL: Yeah, like he said, I'm kind of a hitter at heart, so anytime that ball is in a good spot, I've got to talk to myself and be like, okay, no, no, think it through first.

It's helpful not only for me but for my teammates. If you establish yourself as a hitter -- I was talking about this earlier -- like you can get those one-on-one situations and it makes it a lot easier for your teammates to get kills, you get more assists, it's a win-win.

That's just a part of my game that's always been -- like

when I first started out they're like, oh, you're left-handed. You should be a setter taller. I just happened to get a little taller, so that helped out.

That's just always something that's been instilled in me, is establish yourself so everyone else's job can be easier. It's worked out so far, so hopefully it still works out.

Q. Chard'e, you mentioned this a couple of times about coming from your JUCO background. Do you feel like it's important to represent people who maybe come from more humble beginnings in their college career and to make it to a major conference and being an example in that way, that where you start is not always going to be where you finish?

CHARD'E VANZANDT: Yeah, I'm honestly just happy to be the example for that because a lot of people who play at JUCO, they don't think they can get to this level. I'm living proof that you absolutely can, you just have to work hard, put your head down and compete.

I love competing, and I think that's why Coach Barnes recruited me, because I'm a dog out there. I leave it out there every time. I can thank my JUCO for that because it built so much character.

Q. Chip on the shoulder?

CHARD'E VANZANDT: Always. Always.

Q. Coach Barnes talked about changing positions and how that's been adapting to that and now at this level, as well.

CHARD'E VANZANDT: Yeah, so I've played everything in the front row, and when I first started I was like, I hate this; I want to be in one spot. But I learned if I want to be on the court I have to become comfortable with being uncomfortable and playing wherever it is that my coach needs me and just stepping into different roles.

But I will say my favorite position now is the left side and just playing sixth role because I like to be aggressive, I like to dig balls, and I love hitting the big. I mean, Claire sets a really good big. But yeah, just adjusting.

Q. For Jim, going into your fourth year now coaching in the conference, what's stood out to you about the depth of this league, and how have you seen that get even better with these four West Coast schools?

JIM BARNES: Yeah, we went from by far the best league to just a whole different level with these four. It's been all good.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

I think this year is way different than the other three just from the aspect there's so much more unknown, so many people graduated, so many fifth years are graduated, a lot of new players, international players coming in the league.

I think when you look at that preseason poll, it's more of a guess than anything because no one really knows how the teams are going to look this year. Compared to the others you pretty much knew what they had and what they were returning. I think that's good for us and our program.

I think every team is suspect, especially after the top 3. I think everybody has holes and things and they're going to have to fill. We're going to be right there fighting for every spot.

Q. Claire, Coach has expressed that he feels you're the best setter in the country. Has he expressed that to you, and how do you feel about that?

CLAIRE AMMERAAL: Yes, he is probably one of the most supportive -- I would feel confident saying he's the most supportive coach probably in all conferences, not even just the Big Ten. He trusts in his players so much and he instills such confidence in them but that you have no choice but to believe that you are the best, you are what he says.

I think that's just one of many good qualities that you want to have in a coach, and he really -- like he stands on it when he tells you these things. He will build on it, and he actually puts so much effort into the whole coaching staff does. I think that's been a huge role in developing our team and our players.

Q. Have you guys ever got Caitlin Clark in the gym?

CLAIRE AMMERAAL: I wish. I'm such a huge fan.

JIM BARNES: I coached their team once in a little intersquad, and I told Caitlin to get off the court. She was the worst player on the basketball team.

Q. How does one go about getting a recruit from Estonia and Ukraine, and is this a trend you're seeing across all of college volleyball?

JIM BARNES: Yeah, I think it is just the model we're going to in the United States. And then to have the ability to play at a high level, get an education and earn some money, I think you're going to see a lot more infusion of European players and just international players in general.

So I think Iowa offers that for them, obviously being in the

Big Ten was a big attraction through here, and there's a lot of talent who's grown up playing since they've been really young. They've kind of got an older mindset as far as -- even though they're 18 years old.

We're looking forward to them. They're actually just on their way here. They haven't got here yet, both those international players. I think they'll be walking into a perfect situation for them where they'll be really welcomed and we'll bring out the best in them. I think it's exciting for that part to see how it grows.

Q. Do you have contacts in Estonia?

JIM BARNES: Yeah, we have people we know in different areas that call and always give us information on a lot of different players. Believe me, we were in a battle with a lot of them, and we were so fortunate to get both these -- both these players were offered a lot from other schools and they stuck with their commitment to Iowa, which said a lot, because first it was verbal. Until they've signed you don't know if you're keeping them. They stayed through the whole thing. They were committed to being at Iowa once they said they were Hawkeyes.

A really good experience, so we're looking forward to adding them.

Q. Coach, what made you coach this team?

JIM BARNES: Well, lots of things. That's a great question. Iowa, it's in the best volleyball league in the country, so I'll start with that.

And then Iowa is very unique. It's a place that's so well loved, that entire state. Iowa is the top of the mountain. University of Iowa, everyone is black and gold. They love the school. It's neat to be a part of a family like that. It's made up of really hardworking people, more farmers I think than any other state in the country.

And just the love for the school is incredible, and I think our players get that when they get here. Everyone knows their name. They're following them. They put them up on a pedestal. I think it's a great platform for our players.

It's just a great, wholesome place, too. I think the people there are good-hearted people, hardworking, and I love being in that environment.

Good question.

Q. How much travel is involved in your sport?

CLAIRE AMMERAAL: It's quite a bit. It's a little bit more



now that we've added some people on the other side of the country.

But it's fun. California and Oregon and Washington and all of that, those are all really nice places to see. But it is a little bit of travel going out there.

All the other schools, like in the Midwest, it's not too much. But if you're -- you're probably going to expect to travel every other week. You have your home games and then you can probably expect to either bus or fly anywhere from two to four hours.

It's a bit, but it's not too crazy.

Q. How does playing volleyball at this level impact your personal growth?

CHARD'E VANZANDT: I would say playing volleyball at this level has impacted my personal growth by just showing me that I am capable of anything I put my mind to. Playing at this level has opened so many doors for me, and I'm grateful.

Coming from JUCO, now I'm setting an example for those girls as well and just showing them that they can do it too. That's how it's impacted me.

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