

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Murray State. vs Iowa

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Norman, Oklahoma, USA

Lloyd Noble Center

Iowa Hawkeyes

Coach Jan Jensen

Media Conference

JAN JENSEN: First off, I'm just so grateful to be here. As it's been well documented, our program has had just a major change since about a year ago. I got the job in May and we lost a couple of GOATs in Caitlin Clark and Kate Martin, Gabbie Marshall, that whole class; and obviously my dear friend and mentor, Lisa Bluder. This year has been filled with a lot of change.

I couldn't have been blessed with a better group. We've just had a great time growing together. And we've had some incredible highs, we've had stretches of adversity. When I think back to where we were about six weeks ago and then to end up getting just a really respectable 6 seed, I'm just filled with a lot of gratitude.

I'm thrilled to be here. It's a heck of a field that's here. I know we have our hands full starting right off the bat. But, boy, I'm just glad we got the opportunity.

Q. Wanted to ask about Kylie Feuerbach coming back next year and how important it is for your efforts next year, defensively, shooting, et cetera?

JAN JENSEN: We're thrilled that Kylie is returning. What we've done with all those COVID years, even back to the kids -- Monika Czinano, if you followed our program -- we never ever made a mandate of timing. I just feel like, as anything in life, if you're on a job, if you're retiring, if you're switching jobs, whatever, there's a feel. There's a timing process.

We told Kylie, like we've told all of the kids that have played for us, hey, we'd love to have you back, but we want you back if you want to be back.

So we went through the year and Kylie went through Senior Day, she wasn't sure. But then when she slept on it, she knew. I was thrilled.



I think to have that type of quality of a person, first and foremost, is such a great thing for our program. She's a great teammate.

We'll continue to be relatively young next year. We're obviously losing Lucy Olsen and Sydney Affolter. Those have been key cogs in this program, Syd's leadership. To have Kylie coming in with our incoming freshman class, and we have some pretty good freshmen playing with us right now, and to have Kylie's steady hand and her defense is going to be really good for us moving forward. I was extremely pleased.

If you saw the social media post when she announced it to our team, I think that tells you all you need to know about Kylie and about, I think, our team culture.

Q. I like that you acknowledged the field's going to be pretty tough right off the bat. Murray State is the highest-scoring offense in the nation. Defense will play a huge role in this game, especially with players like Feuerbach and Affolter forcing turnovers, Stuelke being your top rebounder. What role do you think defense will pretty much have in this contest, and how do you think your team plans to execute it?

JAN JENSEN: I think I spent a lot of my life in the Valley. So I have incredible respect for the Valley. And incredibly impressed with Murray State.

We had the day off at practice, the semifinals of the Missouri Valley tournament, and I was watching Drake because their coaching staff is a friend of mine. I spent some time at Drake, played there. And they were up 30 when I turned it on, and I've never seen Drake down 30 many times in my life. I was, like, whoa. Drake closed the gap, but I remember thinking that team's hot, they're kind of fun.

Then the next day we get the draw and it was, like, gosh, we've got Murray State. That's what's fun about the tournament.

But their story, I think, is really cool. Former player leading



them. Every time I've seen their staff on the road, they're just hard-working, quality people. It seems like they're really at a great trajectory in their program. And they're really a hard guard, but in a really fun way.

I think both of us like to go fast. We're probably going to try to minimize each other. They go a little faster than us. And back in the day, two or three years ago, maybe, we went as fast.

But I think defense will be key. I think shot selection will be key. If you're not hitting, I think that's true for both teams. Shot selection is not a big thing if you're scoring. If you're hot and you've got one pass, two pass and you're shooting it and hitting it or you're not reversing the ball but if you're making shots, it's all good.

But if you're not hitting shots and you can't get the discipline for shot selections, then I think that's where the story will lie. And I think defense will dictate that.

Also, I don't know if you guys saw -- I was watching Shaka Smart, one of his interviews. They asked him what team do you think will win. He said something to the effect, "I think the team that fouls the most but they don't get calls." So I don't know, maybe there's something to that.

Q. You mentioned the style. You mentioned Murray State having the highest-scoring offense. How difficult is it to prepare for a team like Murray State, especially not having played them in this season?

JAN JENSEN: Yeah, it really is because they have a post that most of us haven't faced. I liken her, Markowski for Nebraska can hit a 3, a trail 3. She can set a screen and she can pop for a 3. But you don't see them as often.

Katelyn Young is, just, she's really good, obviously her 3,000 points. But what I really appreciate, I think, in pure shooters, a lot of shooters, they like to be in rhythm. You're coming off a screen, you catch, you pivot, you score. You know your play. You're coming from a cross screen; it's a fake and a go.

She's one of the few players, especially at the elbow -- they run a lot of great stuff. So everybody's talking about their transition. They run a lot of great sets. A lot of them. She'll catch it at the elbow and she's a heck of a passer. She'll look, she'll look and doesn't like it. And when her defense's hands are down after two seconds, she's able to pull it and it's nothing but net. And that is a very underrated skill that I don't think people talk about with great shooters enough.

Usually if you make someone think about it, their

percentage goes down. I don't think that at all about her. She's a heck of a post player. I think I would have loved coaching her. Highest respect.

Q. You spent an awful lot of time as an assistant -- 25 years at Iowa, before that at Drake. Can you put in perspective what it means for you to be in this position right now for the first time after all these years as an assistant?

JAN JENSEN: I don't even know why I'm choked up. I think that tells you all you need to know, maybe.

I think what's cool about it is there's a lot of different ways you can go through this thing in life. You can set your goals and you tell the world what your goals are and you're going for it. And I went through a lot of different things in my career because -- I started at Drake. I love Drake.

Lisa Bluder coached me. Became one of my best friends. We left Drake to go to Iowa. Wanted a challenge. And then I had some different coaching jobs. Some of my coaching friends or frenemies, they always critique that I stayed: Why you staying? You should go.

And I have a strong faith. I was just so content where I was. And that sometimes is so different in this world. Everybody is telling you you've got to do this and you've got to be that. And I really loved my role. I loved it. Jenni Fitzgerald, Lisa Bluder, we coached together a long time.

So when they went off, I always wanted my shot. I'm so thankful to Beth Goetz and President Barb Wilson that they gave me this shot because it doesn't often happen that way.

So often people say, you've got to go to grow. You've got to go to grow. I'm probably one of the small percentages that got to do it with who they wanted to do it with for as long as that was an opportunity.

For me to be able to get the dream job -- just the different chair, I had the dream job -- but just a different chair, and then have my staffs hold -- Abby Stamp played for us; Raina Harmon, great, one of the top assistants in the country; Tania Davis played for us -- she's our player development. To have them stay and then I got Randi Peterson-Henderson to come back. Her husband also played basketball at Iowa. Randi played for us.

So then to take over this job that has just been a prize jewel for everybody -- I don't mean that in a cocky way; we know what Caitlin and Lisa and everybody did. For me to sit here and be in the NCAA Tournament with all the twists and turns, I feel really, really grateful, really thankful

because it's hard to make the NCAA Tournament. It's hard to do it, and to do it consistently.

So long-winded answer, but I'm just a really thankful coach that got a shot later in life. And we're having a blast. And I hope we get to have a blast for at least another game and get another shot at the next game.

Q. You've got two Waterloo West alums, one on Oklahoma and one on Murray State in Halli Pooch. They both played for All Iowa Attack, played for the teams that a lot of your current players came from. What do you remember from Halli and Sahara on the recruiting trail? And to put yourself in Halli's shoes, what was it like to be a mid-major player going up against a big state school, especially on a stage as big as March Madness?

JAN JENSEN: I think that's an interesting thing how both of those Waterloo West kids ended up in the same pod. I recruited the heck out of Sahara Williams. She's fantastic, explosive. Recruited Halli as well to a degree. But Halli is really good. And that's always the situation.

There's a lot of great mid-majors where there's other kids in their position a little bigger, a little this or a little that.

So it comes down to splitting hairs sometimes. But what you'll see of Maya McDermott at UNI; Halli Pooch at Murray State; Katie Dinnebie, one of the most fantastic guards at Drake University; the size, boy, they're still really, really good.

So great respect. It's just sometimes, when you're recruiting, sometimes you go with a size or you go with a kid that's a little this or a little that. So just tremendous respect.

And Halli Pooch is a baller. Crafty. Boy, you don't want to give her much space. But I remember watching them, probably watched them, I don't know, 30, 40 games because they played in All Iowa Tech, they're really good and great careers and they're enjoying moments. I'm not surprised at all that they are.

Q. You've talked a lot about this team being very young and you're graduating -- was five -- now four fourth-year's next year. What do you think is the dynamic on this team right now, the fact that you'll sub in Stremlow or Guyton and Heiden and have them playing alongside someone like Olsen, Feuerbach and Affolter, and how do you think it will potentially work to your advantage against an opponent you've never seen before?

JAN JENSEN: The thing this year is when we started to hit it is the young and old started to blend.

Early in the non-con, it was really our youth that was helping us have a lot of success. The veterans were tight. They were wanting it so much.

Then as we flipped and started to settle, it was the vets. Lucy started to settle and Syd started to really lead. We shifted Hannah from the 4 to the 5, and we started to use the youth as more in the subbing role, right? So when we started to become a little bit more consistent and successful, the blend started to be a little less noticeable.

When it was a little less noticeable, then it was, you were seeing just the nice flow and being led by the people that really needed to lead it because they've been there before.

So now what I hope happens is that our vets can have the moments that they've dreamed about so very long but we get enough experience moments for these young kids to help us have success for this year but also down the future.

For us to beat Murray State, we're going to have to have everybody play really well. We can't have an off night. You can't think about having an off night or an off morning. I would like the blend to be unnoticeable in the sense who's in and who's out but to also look really, really good and really sharp.

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