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An Interview With:

KANSAS STATE COACH DEB PATTERSON

PETER IRWIN: We're now joined by Coach Patterson from Kansas State University. Coach, welcome, and your thoughts about the upcoming season.

COACH PATTERSON: Well, I think coming off the heels of a season in which the Big 12 qualified eighth for the NCAA tournament, it's exciting to think of the challenges that rest ahead for all of us in this league.

I think we coaches have a great deal of pride in the fact that this is the No. 1 team in attendance, No. 1 team in RPI and always look forward to the challenge of game-by-game facing the best coaches and players in this country.

I think it's exciting to see the fact that a program like Oklahoma in one preseason publication is ranked No. 1 in the nation. I think that brings great attention and validity to the framework of the season ahead.

So all great things. And I know at Kansas State our players are very much looking forward to raising it up and getting after it again.

PETER IRWIN: Questions.

Q. Last year you didn't have a very successful non-conference season, didn't play very well at all in non-conference but then turned it around and ended up winning the Big 12 regular conference title. Is non-conference overrated or what was the factor there and how important is it that you get off to a good start this year?

COACH PATTERSON: I think the non-conference slate for our program last year just helped prepare us for our runs through conference, so I think that non-conference schedule is very important. I think you have an opportunity like we did a year ago to learn a lot about yourself, about what might be working, what's not working. And

certainly our basketball team used the non-conference to teach all of us how to be a better basketball team as we transitioned into Big 12 play.

And I think it's a very essential element. I think ours is always a non-conference schedule that has enough challenges that we begin to stretch ourselves like we will be stretched in Big 12 play. But then also provides us with opportunities to get our feet on the ground to learn a little bit about combinations and personnel.

And then our success from non-conference to conference play last year was a tribute to the resiliency and persistence and toughness and the competitive disposition of the team that we had on the floor last year, with great leaders and great chemistry.

Q. Do you have any comments or any thoughts about Kendra Wecker joining the coaching staff over at OU?

COACH PATTERSON: No, I think it's great. Any time a young person that's established a great collegiate career has the opportunity to make that transition into the college game at any level, I think anybody that has a heart for coaching the game and continuing on their basketball careers, it's great for women's basketball. And we wish her the very best in her endeavors along the lines of becoming a coach at the collegiate level.

Q. We talked about this a little bit earlier, but talk about you won the conference last year and you lose one player and your preseason ranking in a tough conference, granted, but how you and your team felt about that, and also highlight maybe some newcomers you think can make an immediate impact?

COACH PATTERSON: I think the way we look at this league and the great coaches and players that are part of it, the preseason ranking to us isn't significant in a lot of ways. It's strictly -- I think just speaks to the toughness of this league and the talent of the coaches and players in it.

We approach every season sort of as a blank page. We understand we'll be developing a new team. Kimberly Dietz was absolutely phenomenal last year for us and was a big piece of our success. But I love the core group of players we have returning. They've got great experience at winning under their belt and all the intrinsic ways they've learned a lot of lessons that will carry over.

So I'm very excited about the core group of players we bring back, and they're very excited about their season, and none of us are preoccupied with preseason picks. We understand that it's game by game you establish who you're going to be, once you transition into Big 12 play.

With our freshman group, I think we've got a group who is pretty young this year. Because of the quality of our core, it will be surprising to me to see any of those freshmen this year make a major breakthrough and impact in our program. But I'm definitely open to the thought of it and open, certainly, to anyone that wants to bust through that door and rattle the cage and find a way to be an impact player.

But I think it's probably more a reflection of the quality of returners that we have that that will be a very tough step for them to take. They're walking into a gym with great leadership and great talent around them and certainly an environment in which they can learn and develop a great deal about the mental and the physical aspects of becoming great players. So that's exciting to me for them.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you, Coach.

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