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An Interview With:

IOWA STATE COACH GREG MCDERMOTT

PETER IRWIN: Coach Greg McDermott is now joining us, Iowa State coach. Your comments.

COACH MCDERMOTT: Good morning. It's nice finally for a season we have some returning guards in our program. And that's been obviously an issue of both our first two years, we started over with new guards, both in my initial season and again last season. And sometimes those guys can have such an impact on your practice, because of their understanding of your system.

And just to have Diante Garrett and Bryan Petersen and Sean Haluska back in the fold, and Lucca Staiger, even though he was not eligible last year, certainly has an understanding of what we were doing.

Things have gone a lot smoother to this point, and we're trying to break in seven new faces into our program and those guys have done a terrific job of making that happen. And then in the front line to have Alex Thompson, who played significant minutes for us a year ago and then Craig Brackins, who showed signs of -- hopefully of what's to come in the future last season, and now we just need him to be a little bit more consistent.

So we're a very young team. Eleven of the 15 are freshmen and sophomores. But love their work ethic, love their attitude and have been really impressed with their chemistry in the early going.

Now we just have to continue to try to move this program forward.

PETER IRWIN: Questions.

Q. Can you just look at where you might fit in in a league where there are a lot of young teams? Kansas lost a lot. Missouri has seven new faces.

COACH MCDERMOTT: Certainly in the North there are a lot of young faces. And I think

with young teams, the first thing you have to try to do is to try to protect your home floor and that's something we didn't do a great job of at times last year that has to improve this season.

I feel like Hilton Coliseum is one of the best places in the country to play. I think we have a terrific home court advantage because of our fans are so loyal.

So we have to take care of our home court first and then learn how to win on the road. And we weren't able to get a conference road win last year. And we had a couple of close calls, and we need to get over the hump in that regard.

But I certainly would hope that we could move out of that bottom tier, the Big 12 and get to the point where the games we're playing at the end of February and early March are meaningful games.

Q. When you look at the overall Big 12 a lot of teams getting first place votes. Teams like Kansas very young, as you mentioned. Is there maybe an opening this year maybe more so than in past years where there's not that dominant team?

COACH MCDERMOTT: I don't think there's a team that you can look at that returns so many players that was one of the top couple teams last year that you look at and say they're going to fill that spot.

Certainly a team like Baylor, when you have that much experience in the guard court and you bring all that back, I think it gives you the upper hand. I think Texas, the returning group that Texas has, even though you take D.J. Augustin out of the mix -- he's a very talented player -- but what he had around him last year was very talented as well.

So I think there are a couple of teams and then certainly Oklahoma with Blake's decision to come back to school, he's one of the premiere players in the league. So those three, at least in my mind, and then Kansas, sometimes success breeds success. And Sherron Collins is a winner and Cole Aldrich got some significant experience

last year, although limited at times, that he's ready to step into the role of the guys he was playing behind. And I know that the group of guys that they brought in is a very talented young group.

So I don't think there is an A team that you can slot in there, but I think there will be four or five that can compete for it.

Q. Can you just talk about how difficult it was for Lucca Staiger to sit out last season and what kind of threat he poses for you on the perimeter?

COACH MCDERMOTT: Well, it was extremely difficult. Part of it was we didn't really see it coming. I had coached and recruited from that program in the past and hadn't had any problems. So I didn't see any issues with Lucca's situation. So because of that we appealed it all the way to the end which really got to the beginning of the season.

So there was always hope there that we could at least get the suspension down to five games or eight games and hopefully have him have some sort of season. And when it finally came down, it was very difficult for him and his family. But fortunately we're at a place where our fans care a great deal, not just about our team, but about the individuals on our team.

And they went above and beyond to try to make him feel at home at Iowa State, and that is the sole reason he stayed. He could have packed his bags and gone home and started a professional career back at home, but he decided that an education was important to him and he was committed to Iowa State, and we're excited to hopefully get him back on the floor.

He's having his knee scoped tomorrow. We'll find out the extent of his knee injury, but he certainly is going to be a big part of our team if he can play.

Q. Given Kansas' title, the season Texas and some other teams had, big year for the league, is there a trickle-down effect to all the programs in recruiting after a season like that?

COACH MCDERMOTT: Without question. I think the success that our league had nationally in the non-conference portion of our season last year is a big plus when you're competing against the other BCS conferences and having success.

And certainly the deep runs that our teams have made into the NCAA tournament is a huge boost in recruiting, as well as the number of

players that we have drafted in the NBA draft. All those things, when you combine them, becomes a very attractive -- the Big 12 becomes a very attractive place for kids to play from all over the United States.

And certainly our partnership with ESPN allows our recruits to watch games all over the country. And that's a big plus, and it certainly has affected us. That's the positive. The negative it's a little harder for teams that are trying to catch up and build a program to get there as quick as you'd like.

Q. When you look at the Big 12 now and there's so many one-and-done guys, play one year, it's hard to keep up with who's got what and everything. Does it make preparation more difficult versus knowing a guy is going to be there for four years and who's got what back with every team?

COACH MCDERMOTT: Certainly changes. And as I mentioned earlier, in the North this year there's a lot of new faces throughout our half of the league.

So from a personnel standpoint, it does change. The good news on a lot of different fronts is that there weren't any coaching changes in the North. So the system doesn't change.

So at least there's some consistency as to how you prepare for that system and style of play. And in my opinion there's too many coaching changes that happen throughout our business each and every year, and it seems to have trickled down to the lower levels of Division I and that's unfortunate.

So it's good to see that in our league there was only one change last season.

Q. Can you talk about some of the newcomers you've been impressed the most with through the first few days of practice?

COACH MCDERMOTT: Probably in the early going, Dominique Buckley and Wes Eikmeier, probably in the guard court, have shown that they may be a little bit more ready than I thought they would be. Dominique, his strength and decisions with the basketball, I think he can come in and have an impact at the point guard position immediately. We were a dismal shooting team last year.

And Wes Eikmeier hopefully can help us solve that problem. He's a prolific scorer, shoots

with great range and has probably shown me that he has a little bit more off the dribble than I probably anticipated.

He played at a small school in Nebraska. You don't know how that translates from small high school basketball to the college level. But he's been able to find his way into the paint and get his shot off in practice pretty consistently.

And then our three frontline freshmen have done a nice job in different ways, but Justin Hamilton's probably separated himself somewhat the last five or six practices. He was hurt most of the summer. So we didn't get to see a lot of him in the summer and even our fall workouts. He's back on the floor and hasn't missed a practice. That 6'-11", almost 260 pounds gives us something we really haven't had and I've been impressed with what he's done so far.

Q. The fact that one or two players that you recruit can make such a big difference in that year, do you think that's led to the unwillingness of schools to wait like they might in football, and that that has led to quicker turnover in basketball?

COACH MCDERMOTT: You know, possibly. I mean, I think if you're going to build a program with staying power, with a foundation, it takes time. There's no quick fix to that.

You have to get the right leadership in your program. And now we're moving in a direction with our particular program where Bryan Petersen and Alex Thompson, Sean Haluska have been in the program for a number of years and they're teaching this group of freshmen how to lead.

And that's a difficult thing, because if coaches have to do all the leadership on their own, it's tough to build a team. And because we've had so much turnover, we haven't been able to develop that leadership in our program. And now I feel like we're moving in that direction.

But without question, there's a lot of different ways to build a program. And my belief is you do it the majority of high school kids, you get people in your program for four and five years, and my hope is that some day that the program will be strong forever. And that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to clean up some other problems in the program.

There's a lot that goes into that that people don't understand. But without question it's easier to fix a basketball program than it is a football program. You can hide a deficiency on the

basketball court. It's very difficult to do on the football field.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you, Coach.

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