

October 21, 2009



An interview with:

IOWA STATE COACH BILL FENNELLY

PETER IRWIN: We're now joined by Coach Fennelly from Iowa State.

Coach, welcome. Your comments.

COACH FENNELLY: Good morning, everyone. Nice to see everyone again and certainly appreciate your time and effort. As always, the things you do for our league and our student-athletes.

Like everyone else, just really, really excited to get started and looking forward to the opportunity to play in the best league in the country. Certainly excited about the new team that we have and looking forward to seeing what happens.

PETER IRWIN: Questions for Coach.

Q. Hi, Coach. How much is the nature of the league changed this year? You graduated a lot, the Parises are gone, Marlise Gibson.

COACH FENNELLY: Thank God the Parises are gone.

It's changed, but the one thing that's always constant is we have always some of the best players in the country in our league. We have some outstanding coaches. So you always know there's going to be good teams.

Certainly, we lost a lot of very good players through graduation, but I think what it does, though, is it allows other players like -- I mean, Danielle McCray in my mind is the best player in the country that a lot of people don't know about. Now she's going to get her chance to shine.

There's going to be a lot of new faces, new players. That's the way this league is. Great players leave, and great players come in.

When you look at the coaches in our league and the commitment that the universities have made, it's going to continue.

You know, different names, different faces, same thing. Great league, great players, and a lot of competition. I hope the fans enjoy watching it, and I hope all of you enjoy covering it.

Q. How much of a shadow would the Parises -- you know, the last four years, did -- did they have starting every year, it seemed like?

COACH FENNELLY: You know, Ashley and Courtney both did a lot for our league. Not just for the University of Oklahoma. They did a lot for women's basketball. They did a lot for the Big 12. And they were great ambassadors for our sport and for the league.

But at the same time, there's probably a lot of good players that maybe didn't get the attention they deserved. Again, I go back to Danielle McCray, and there will be others like her that will now get their attention.

Kelsey Griffin at Nebraska, and you can go right down the list. Ashley Sweat, K-State. People like that that are really, really great players but maybe didn't get as much attention because Courtney especially, and Ashley her senior year, dominated our league so much and were in a program that brought so much attention to our league.

But there's a lot of good players in our league, and I think you'll see them this year.

Q. Hey, Bill, talk about what having a 6'6" player now adds to your team that maybe you didn't have last season.

COACH FENNELLY: I'd tell you if she was practicing more. She's got a stress fracture. So I don't really know. Anna Prins is almost 6'7", a very, very skilled kid. I think she's a kid that will be a great asset to our team, great asset to our league.

She's someone that I think is a very -- has a chance to be a really, really special player. She

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can shoot the ball. She's not just someone you're going to stand on the block. She can shoot the 3. She can do a lot of things.

Unfortunately, she had a stress fracture. They diagnosed it end of September. So she's just starting to run and work out a bit. But she'll change our team.

She's certainly not someone that we've been fortunate to have -- obviously the tallest player we've ever had at Iowa State. But I think someone that will make other people prepare for in a unique way. Like, you know, Courtney Paris and certainly Brittney Griners of the world.

They're unique players not just because of their size, but in Anna's case, because of her skill set. Hopefully, everyone will get a chance to see her at her best. I think, if you do, she's someone that will really, really impact, not just our team, but I think the way the league is looked at too.

Q. How has being an assistant coach with the USA Under-19 Team enhanced your coaching at Iowa State and winning the gold this year?

COACH FENNELLY: It was a great experience. I worked with Carol Owens at Northern Illinois, Amanda Butler of Florida, two great people. And you're always learning.

We had a lot of very, very talented kids. I think what it does, it makes you appreciate even more the chance to coach, to represent your country.

I told people back home, I've heard the National Anthem a lot of times in my life at our games, going to recruit at high school games, whatever. But when you hear the National Anthem with a gold medal around your neck and you're watching the flag be raised in a foreign country, I can't -- I'm not going to lie to you, my heart was coming out of my chest.

It was a great honor, and certainly something I'll remember for a long, long time.

Q. Bill, Alison and Kelsey are going to have a lot on their shoulders this year, and I guess they're prepared for that. Can you talk about what each one of them is going to need to bring for you.

COACH FENNELLY: Everyone is always asked, how are the freshman going to do? Five of our top seven players are brand new. Ten of our players have played almost no Division I basketball. So the challenge becomes -- the

pressure is on in my mind Alison and Kelsey. They've played before.

I think if Alison is completely healthy for a year, she's as good as any player in our league. I really believe that.

She's our best player. She's our point guard. She's the leader of this team. And I say that at our media day. It's her team. She wants it to be her team.

And I think Kelsey is someone that can score the ball. That's the number one challenge for us right now is finding scorers. Kelsey started for two years and I think understands her role from role player, someone who was one of the options to being one of the options.

They both understand that. They're both bright kids. They've worked very hard at it. They've had great summers. I talked to them collectively and individually about what's ahead for them and the frustrations they're going to feel at times playing with new players, players who don't understand what it takes to win at the Big 12 level. They do have a lot on their shoulders. There are going to be days when it doesn't seem real fair to them. But I have a lot of confidence in them.

They'll both have really good years. I really believe that. If they do, I think we have a much better chance to be successful than maybe a lot of people think.

Q. Bill, this is not Big 12-related specifically, but you played Stanford last year. They're going to be one of the --

COACH FENNELLY: You had to bring that up. Twice.

Q. You did. They're bringing so many people back. Do you think they're a legitimate hope for a national champion this year?

COACH FENNELLY: If they play us all the time, they are. They're really good. Obviously, very well coached. Do not have any weak link.

I think the challenge for them to beat UConn is how can they find point guard play at the level that they need to have it.

I mean, they have amazing size, depth. You know, Nekka (phonetic) was on our team this summer and has gotten a lot better. Jane is obviously a tremendous player. But they're certainly a team, I think, can contend. I think the challenge for them will be the point guard play at the highest level.

I don't think there's any question that most people would say Connecticut, Stanford, and you just don't want to get in their region kind of thing. So very, very good team and certainly a team, I think, will be rated very, very high all year and deservedly so.

PETER IRWIN: Okay, Coach. We wish you the best of luck.

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