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An interview with:

KANSAS STATE COACH DEB PATTERSON

PETER IRWIN: We're now joined by Deb Patterson from Kansas State.

Coach, welcome, and your thoughts about the upcoming season.

COACH PATTERSON: Well, we're looking forward to what will be kind of an adventurous season for us. Going to be very young.

With the exception of Ashley Sweat, who is a returning First Team All-Big 12 player, who we're extremely excited about the versatility and the talents that she brings to the floor. And Kari Kincaid as our other experienced senior on the floor.

So it should be a fun year for us in terms of integrated in some youth. A new look for Kansas State women's basketball. And, obviously, great challenges ahead in what I think is the best league in America.

PETER IRWIN: We'll go with questions from the floor for Coach.

Q. I know you don't fill a hole like the one that Shalee Lehning left behind, but how do you plan on, I guess, attacking that hole and trying to cover it up?

COACH PATTERSON: Well, we're looking to do it by committee, obviously. I think you have an exceptional player like Lehning, and as you said, you don't necessarily replace that. But we have Kelsey Hill returning as a sophomore, who played very limited minutes, and then we have three freshmen players who have come into the gym in Mariah White, Brittany Chambers, and Taelor Karr.

And so I look at that position right now as one in transition. We'll evaluate day to day what

kind of impact we think that those four might be able to bring to the challenge there at the point position.

And I'm not above thinking that it won't be something that continues to evolve even through the course of the season with all the youth and the inexperience that we'll bring there.

You know, there's a great advantage in having a 40-minute-per player, All-America caliber point guard, and then there's also the challenge of replacing her.

So the young people we have in the gym right now are hungry. They're playing hard. They're working hard. And we'll try to simplify the game a little bit for them and see, as the season develops, who assumes the greater portion of that responsibility.

Q. Also, with the weapons that you lost, this is probably the lowest you've been picked preseason-wise because of all the youth and the inexperience. Is this a team, though, that could really surprise some people?

COACH PATTERSON: I think it's a team that day by day we'll figure out honestly what we're going to be.

I look at the picks in this league, and relative to what we're bringing back, I think, again, we're a very fair pick, if not an aggressive pick at eighth in this league, to tell you the truth.

At the same time, I know that we have players that are very aggressive and hungry and will compete hard and well. It's just the league is extraordinary. And for us, honestly, it's going to be a game by game in the nonconference and then a game by game through the season to figure out what it is we're capable of bringing.

I don't necessarily bring an expectation at all of what when the season's done, we will have been able to bring to the table. I think that's going to be part of the challenge on the table for us is to establish an identity, to figure out how our young players and our players without any significant game experience are going to transition into Big 12 play and how they'll answer the challenges on the

road and at home.

Q. Coach, with all of the rebounding you lost last year with Shalee and also with Marlies Gipson, how are you going to try to replace that this year? Is that something you'll have to work on throughout the year?

COACH PATTERSON: It's something we've made a huge priority in these early days of practice obviously. With both Marlies and Shalee, you're losing about 16 rebounds a game, and we've never been known as the great rebounding power in our league as it is.

So we understand that that's an area of the game, in terms of production, that has to be answered. And in large respect, that's going to be a major factor in our opportunity to win and be competitive in games.

So it's going to be something that everyone needs to work to improve upon or to bring great attention to.

You know, the thing about rebounding, especially offensive rebounding, is my thought is so much of that is instinctive and want-to, and it's a natural -- sort of an aggression and a mentality that you bring to going and getting the ball.

So we know we have that with those two. It's definitely a hard thing to develop. I'm hoping we'll see as Branshea Brown and as Jalana Childs see their minutes expand, I hope that we're able to get more interior rebounding than we've had in the past. We've pretty much relied on Marlies to handle the load there.

So certainly that's where we would begin and try to start. But we also understand we've got to have our perimeter players going to get the ball as well, and that's something Shalee had a great knack for just instinctively.

Q. You had probably as good a senior performances the last two years, meaning Kim Dietz and then Shalee and Marlies. Do you expect the seniors you have this year are going to be able to elevate their games the way those players did as seniors?

COACH PATTERSON: I think what's interesting about Dietz and Shalee is they were surrounded by almost a core of fellow juniors or seniors that put them in position to be very strong and to be productive.

I think the challenge for Ashley and for Kari is that they'll be on the floor with very young and inexperienced players. And so the game will be very unique and distinct relative to what Dietz and

Shalee and Marlies had the opportunity to experience.

So it's my hope that we'll be able to find production for them that is consistent with what they've brought, you know, last year. And in Kari's case, I hope can surpass her production.

Ashley, I don't know that you can expect anybody in this league to score better than 16 points per game. That's an awesome production.

But it's going to, in many ways, dictate the level of success we have. How strong are those two? What kind of numbers can they put up playing around young players and having everybody's best defenders bring maximum attention to them each night? That will be part of the challenge that they each face and I think part of the transition that they go through through the course of this season.

Q. Just in talking about Shalee, did you get a chance to see her play this summer, and were you surprised by the level of success she had in her rookie season in the WNBA?

COACH PATTERSON: I had the opportunity to see her play in person and obviously a lot on the Internet. And, no, I wasn't surprised at all. I knew in my heart and my mind and experience that she'd be a phenomenal next-level player.

But my belief is that, as players transition to the WNBA, particularly players like Shalee, what's critical is that you find the right fit and the right opportunity, or you sometimes get lost. I think she had the advantage of getting to a team that needed a player at the position she plays to assert themselves. And the opportunities fell into place for her to do that.

There was no surprise whatsoever for me, and I don't believe for the other coaches in this league, that she transitioned well and had great deal of success once she got there and had that window of opportunity.

But, you know, there are a lot of great players that might not get that opportunity at just the right moment, and she transitioned into a team that had a need at the point position, and once that opportunity arose, she pretty much assumed it full force and obviously did a great job.

PETER IRWIN: Coach, best of luck to you in the season. Thank you very much.

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