

October 21, 2009



An interview with:

NEBRASKA COACH CONNIE YORI

PETER IRWIN: We're now joined by Coach Yori from Nebraska.

Coach, welcome. Your opening comments, if you would, please.

COACH YORI: I was sitting back there waiting for about 15 minutes. Blair must have been in front of me, huh?

I've heard this a little bit today, that some folks are saying we're a sleeper. In the race. We were definitely a sleeper last year, at least we put our fans to sleep with how bad we were on offense. So hopefully we'll be able to turn the corner a little bit in that area.

I'm really, really excited about our team. I think everybody comes up here and makes that statement. I think -- I went home last night, and my husband of 14 years -- and we've been together for 16 years -- asked me, Hey, how did practice go? I said, It went great. We've had now six practices, and every night I've gone home, and every night my husband's asked me that, and every night I've said, It's gone great.

He said, what is wrong with you? You are never this positive. And I said, well, you know, honey, I'm a realist. I'm not an optimist. I'm not a pessimist, but I'm a realist. I'm real excited about our team.

I think we have some things in place that we haven't always had. Like everybody, you've got to get healthy and stay healthy. But we have a lot of the components there that we could have a great season. We've got great leadership, got 16 years in our program, and in each case they've all been four-year players for us.

Kelsey Griffin, actually, this is her fifth year in our program. So that in itself is positive.

We have enough talent. Are we the most talented team in the league? No. But we have enough talent. We have a lot of really hard workers in our program.

I think our players have really held themselves accountable for -- since the end of last season to push forward and get a lot of things done in the off season, so that's great. We've got great character in our program.

And on top of it, we've got great experience and depth. A lot of positives. You know, I could find a couple negatives, but I'm trying to stay as a realist right now.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you, Coach. We'll take questions from the floor.

Q. How's Griffin look now that she's back in the swing of things?

COACH YORI: How you doing, Dan?

Q. Life's a 10.

COACH YORI: I knew you'd say that.

First of all, Kelsey, of course, has been a two-time All-Big 12 player for us. Sat out last year with an injury. Had two ankle surgeries in about a ten-month span. Went 13 months without playing basketball.

About a month ago, she was cleared to go full go. It's amazing where she is right now. It's a great credit to her how hard she's worked in rehab, in how hard she's worked in the conditioning phase of where she needed to be.

Whether it be on the bike or whether it be on the treadmill or in the water, she really worked to stay in great shape, and she is -- I think this is the best shape she's ever been in. You know, the fact that she hasn't played for so long says a lot about who she is.

But she -- it's great to have her back, obviously. She's playing at a level right now that I haven't seen, and yet she was one of the best players in our league two years ago.

Q. It always struck me she had real sneaky athleticism, if that's one of those terms.

Is she still as athletic, or is it part of it just that she's such a smart, experienced player?

COACH YORI: No. Kelsey's a good athlete. I mean, she can get up, and she loves to scare me to death after practice and start hanging on the rim. It's like quit doing that, you know. We don't need another injury.

But she's a better athlete than you might think. She moves -- obviously, she can run the floor as well as, you know, really any post player in our league. But on top of it, she's improved her lateral quickness. She jumps really well, but she's also very strong. All the things that you're looking in a good athlete, Kelsey is.

PETER IRWIN: Another question on the front left.

Q. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about your guard play. It seems like you've got a lot of options. How do you see that playing out?

COACH YORI: Well, we're really deep, and that's exciting. We have some -- we haven't been as good a shooting team the past couple years as we would like. That's something we hope that we corrected in the off-season.

I feel like we had a lot of players that spent a lot of time in the gym. We have a little 10,000 make club in the off-season, and we had more players involved in making those shots than we ever had. So credit to them. We're making more shots at practice than I've seen.

With our post-game, and we haven't even talked about core yet. But we've got a really good post-game. Teams are going to try to take away our post-game. Well, we've got to have players who make shots, and we've got a lot of options there.

You notice I haven't even mentioned one name because our depth is really strong at that position, at those positions.

Q. You mentioned -- you've got a lot of people back from last year. Do you see the caliber of play, has that taken a step up from the things you said at the start that you didn't like?

COACH YORI: Well, I've been coaching -- I've been a head coach for 20 years. The teams that I have coached over the years that have played really good basketball are the teams that early in the season I've seen them be a little bit ahead of where you would hope they would be.

So right now we're playing a little bit ahead of the game, which is obviously encouraging. I think that comes with just having a lot of seniors and a lot of juniors that have played.

So we go to practice, and we're doing a drill. We've got 20 minutes up on the clock to do the drill. At the 20-minute mark, we feel like we've accomplished something. That doesn't always happen.

Every year you might have a team that you put up 20, and it takes you 40 to get something done. So that's a highly encouraging as to where we are right now.

Q. You mentioned that over there you heard a lot of people saying that you might be a sleeper this year, kind of look at you that way. Do you see yourself, this team as maybe something -- a team that can sleep on some people and sneak up on them and surprise them in the end?

COACH YORI: Well, like I said, we have a lot of the pieces in place that you need to make a push for a conference championship. And I've never even used those words in this setting. And yet at the same time, I think we do have the pieces in place that we can push for, whether it be at least a top four seed and hopefully better.

As we get to -- when we come back to Kansas City, we hope that we can return as a top four seed. I think that's realistic.

Q. Connie, you said you hadn't gotten a chance to talk about Cory, but I've seen some of the things you said about her improvement, even over last year's season. Can you tell us what you -- excuse me -- what we can expect from Cory this year.

COACH YORI: Well, Cory is the most underrated player in our league. You look at the numbers that she put up last year. We weren't a very good offensive team. Everybody tried to take Cory away, and yet she averaged about 20 points, and I believe close to 9 rebounds in the second half of the Big 12 season.

Once she got healthy. She too played with injuries. She dealt with a back injury and shin injuries last year, and when she got healthy, she played great basketball for us.

And even before then, she was playing good basketball for us.

She was, I think -- I think she finished the

season as the eighth leading scorer in our league and the eighth leading rebounder in our league. And she was named Honorable Mention All-Conference. We felt like she had a better year than that. Again, a player that just doesn't get a lot of attention but puts up big numbers.

PETER IRWIN: Coach, thank you very much for your answers. Best of luck to you and the team.

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