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An interview with:

IOWA STATE COACH GREG MCDERMOTT

PETER IRWIN: We are now joined by Coach Greg McDermott from Iowa State.

Coach, welcome. Your thoughts about the upcoming season.

COACH MCDERMOTT: This is the first time in my tenure at Iowa State that we've had the luxury of having some returning players with some experience.

The difference that that has made on the practice floor in the early going has been incredible. It's really eased the transition of the new players that we're trying to get ready to play because there's going to be two or three of them that are going to have to impact our program this year.

But with a guy like Craig Brackins making the decision to return to school, it's really just generated a lot of excitement around our program. Obviously, Craig had a terrific year last year, and he's worked extremely hard to build on that this year.

And then the fact that we opened a new practice facility about a month ago has really given our program a boost. We were all over campus in the past with athletic training in one place and weightlifting in another place and individual workouts in a different place. And now that's all under one roof.

So just what that does to help develop your chemistry because the guys are around the coaches more often, and they're around each other more often. That's moved us in the right direction. But they're working extremely hard in practice.

Without question, we're more athletic than we've been in the past, and now it's just putting those pieces together and moving in the right direction. But so far, I really like what I see.

Q. With the addition of Marquis Gilstrap, how does that do for you guys' depth? Does it take the focus off Gilstrap?

COACH MCDERMOTT: It's "Marquez." It's spelled like Marquis, but it's "Marquez." I made the same mistake early in the recruiting process.

If you're going to win in the Big 12, you have to have versatility on the wing with some size. We were desperately missing that a year ago. We really haven't had that since we had Rahshon Clark.

So Marquis we felt like was one of the more talented wings in the country. Even though at the time he only had one year of eligibility left -- and we're operating under that assumption now -- we felt he was too good to pass up. He's a very powerful rebounder. He shot over 40 percent from the three-point-line last year. And he's just been a joy to coach.

It's a unique situation in that he realizes he might only have one year of college basketball, so he is really cherishing every minute of it, and his eyes are wide open from a coachability standpoint. And as a result, he's getting -- he's just making strides every single day on both ends of the floor.

So, you know, he can score inside and out. And probably even more importantly, he gives us that versatility to defend some of the great wings across our conference.

Q. You got one of the league's premier players, the Newcomer of the Year, and you're still picked eighth in the conference. Is that a conservative estimate and testament to the strength of this league?

COACH MCDERMOTT: They must not think much of the coach is what that must mean. That would be my guess.

But I think it is a testament to the league. I think you could argue -- and it's an easy argument -- the seven teams that are picked ahead of us are picked ahead of us for a reason. Generally, preseason polls are based on how you did last year and what you return. There's just a lot

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G. McDermott

returning in our league.

Some of the newcomers that are entering our league come from very successful backgrounds in high school or junior college, and I think they're going to have quite an impact right away.

So we're picked probably about where we should be picked, but I'll be disappointed if that's where it ends up at the end of the day.

Q. What does the addition of Chris Colvin give you? First of all, when do you think Chris is going to be able to contribute, and what's that do for Diante?

COACH MCDERMOTT: I think Chris will be able to contribute hopefully right away. We needed another point guard that can break down the defense and create some things for his teammates off the dribble. Diante's done that for us the last couple of years, but he was really the only one in the program that was able to do that.

Now with the addition of Chris, I think he can help in that regard. And probably most importantly, we just finally have some depth in the guard corps.

We weren't in a position where we could afford someone to have an off game or someone to sprain an ankle or come down with the flu on game day. We couldn't recover from that.

And now with Diante Garrett, Dominique Buckley, Chris Colvin at the point, Lucca Staiger and Scott Christopherson, the transfer from Marquette at the off guard, and Marquis Gilstrap and Charles Boozer at the power forward, we have a group of guards where there's some depth which, number one, helps you through the tough days, but, number two, there's great competition in practice every single day.

Dominique Buckley, Diante Garrett, Chris Colvin are going at each other every single day, which is making them better.

Q. Greg, was RPI in mind that you've made this nonconference schedule?

COACH MCDERMOTT: Either that, or I was losing my mind. One of the two.

You know, the instate games are built in, which it's a little bit unique in Iowa. It's something I liked a lot more when I was coaching at Northern Iowa than I like now. But those are great games because it's got a big-time atmosphere because no matter where you play, the arena is full. So it tests your guys in that regard.

But we've got a return game from Bradley coming. We started a season with Houston, who had a great year last year. They come back to our place. And I just made the mistake of requesting to go back to California to take Craig Brackins back there, and of course we drew Cal, who's one of the best teams in the Pac-10 this coming year.

And the Duke game was just something that happened late. It was an opportunity for our program to be on the national stage on a night when there wasn't a lot else going on. You know, our fans want us to play games like that, and the reality of it is players want to play in games like that.

It will be a great measuring stick for us as we're about to enter Big 12 play. And I've always felt as a coach, if you've got what you think is a good team, then you need to schedule along those lines and challenge your team. If you have an inexperienced team, you don't want to overschedule. You want to have an opportunity to give them some confidence and have some games that they can win.

I think we've got a good mix of challenging games both at home and on the road.

Q. How big a confidence boost was the big game that Brackins had last year against Kansas?

COACH MCDERMOTT: It was a huge confidence boost for him, and it just -- it changed his perspective on everything because now all of a sudden the opportunity to leave school early was a reality. And, you know, he had a huge game against Northern Iowa in November, where he had 35 and a bunch of rebounds. He did the same thing at Houston, and then he did it in the Big 12 against Kansas on that particular night.

But he was able to back that up with consistent scoring and rebounding after that game. Oftentimes when he was drawing a double-team.

I think he gained a lot of confidence from it. And then when he made the decision to come back, you know, I really think this summer his experience with USA Basketball was a tremendous growing experience for Craig to get out of his comfort zone and go away from home. He came back a much more mature leader, and that's carried over to what he's done for our team.

Q. What do you want Boozer's role to be this year? He obviously stepped in in the

middle of last season and gave you guys another option. How does this depth affect him?

COACH MCDERMOTT: Charles did some good things last year. You know, his freshman year he really shot the ball well. But he wasn't able to pick up everything defensively that we were asking him to do, and he struggled on that end of the floor.

Last year I felt like he made great strides on the defensive end of the floor and with some of the energy he was able to bring us off the bench. He just didn't shoot the basketball very well.

I'm hopeful this year he can put this all together. Obviously, his understanding of the system of play and what our expectations are, now being in his third year, are at a level they haven't been in the past. He sees an opportunity where he can help us.

So far in practice, he's competed extremely hard.

PETER IRWIN: Coach, thank you very much. Good luck.

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