

Big Ten Conference Basketball Media Days

Wednesday October 2, 2019



Steve Pikiell Rutgers Scarlet Knights

STEVE PIKIELL: Good morning. Thank you for coming. Today we had a great night last night. Commissioner Delany, had dinner with him. I want to thank him for making this the great conference that it is. And the great career he had, Hall of Famer for sure. I also want to welcome Kevin Warren into the fold, who takes over the reins now for the greatest conference in the country. And I also want to welcome Juwan and Fred into the league, the league of great coaches just got even better. Those two guys are going to do a terrific job, so welcome them into the league.

Excited about Rutgers and where our program is. Last night I heard the great news, too, about Coach Stringer named a Legends in Coaching, the John Wooden, so I want to congratulate Coach Stringer, our women's coach, who I get a chance to work side by side with every day. She's truly a legend, and that's a really exciting honor for her as she continues her great career.

We have a lot of things going on at Rutgers. It's been a terrific year. We just opened a brand-new practice facility, \$117 million. Thanks to Pat Hobbs, our athletic director and all the great people in Rutgers nation, it's as good a practice facility as there is in the country. Really exciting. We went to Spain this summer with our team, took a tour. The campus is vibrant and exciting. This was the hardest year in admissions to get into Rutgers. Our applicants are up, our standards are up, and I really am excited.

I think our basketball team is up, too. Really, really excited about this year. I have a couple of my athletes in the back. They're great kids with the highest grade point average in school history, 3.1 grade point average with our basketball team. Our season tickets are up a ton. I'm very, very excited, heightened expectations, too, on the banks, and I like that.

But I'm truly honored in my fourth year to be the head coach at Rutgers, and looking forward to some great things this season.

Q. I want to ask you about your freshman Paul Mulcahy, had a chance to cover him at Gill last year, and just your expectations for him and what you think he'll bring to the floor this season?

STEVE PIKIELL: You know, we have a couple newcomers to the program this year, and Paul being one of them, he's a 6'6" point guard, really, really exciting, New Jersey, Bayonne, New Jersey. He was a triple-double guy in the state of New Jersey, one of the first ones in the last 27 years to average a triple-double, which never happens. He can shoot, pass and rebound, really good rebounder. I think he's going to be a really good defender.

I really like my 11 guys. I think we've got versatility. He jumps right in. He's 6'6", he's a big guard who can handle pass and shoot, to go along with Geo Baker and Caleb McConnell. A lot of guys, Peter Kiss, Montez Mathis, that can shoot pass and dribble. Ron Harper in the back of the room here, one of the most improved players in the conference. People are going to see him take the next step. We're excited about Paul, excited to keep a New Jersey guy home, too, and he's a great kid.

We've tried to build this in the last three or four years around great character kids that want to work hard and overachieve, and he fits that mold perfectly, and we're excited about adding him to our roster.

Q. You've touched on this a little bit, but what sort of momentum do you feel you're starting to build in the program? Obviously you had a tough off-season transfer, but where do you think you are as you build this program and what sort of challenges do you see ahead of yourself this year?

STEVE PIKIELL: You know, I'm excited really where the program is. It's kind of taken me a little time to get it where I want it. We have really versatile guys who are big. I love my front court. We have a kid, Myles Johnson, who's 6'11", with a 7'7" wingspan who's improving leaps and bounds from his freshman year to his sophomore year. A kid, Shaq Carter, who came in last year; he'll be one of the most improved players in the league. Had a great tour in Spain. Mamadou Doucoure is back. He redshirted last year. He started 30 games as a freshman. He's physical, he's huge. We brought in a player from Stony Brook, a fifth-year grad transfer who fits in perfectly, great kid, great student. He shoots the ball deep. He gives us a 6'7" guy that can really shoot the ball.

I really feel like we're really good. And I know what we

were picked in the league, and I said to my players, because the league is great, this league has unbelievable coaches, these are unbelievable universities. But Rutgers is pretty good, and we're deep, and we're going to play a little differently because we can. We're very versatile. We're going to have 6'7", 6'8"s across the board, to be able to do some different things, and I really believe in year four here, we now have more solutions to the problems that the league poses.

Every team poses a different problem. Some run it, some walk it, some -- and in the past, we didn't have a lot of solutions to a lot of the different problems that other teams posed to it. We can get up and down now. We can slow it down. We have good shooters, and we're very young. We were the youngest team in the league last year or one of the two top. We have two seniors in the program now, so we're kind of a young program still, but I'm very, very excited, and I know the challenges ahead, too. The scheduling god here in this league didn't do me any favors. We open up with a Hall of Fame coach on the road at Michigan State, so we'll be challenged right off the start of the season.

But I really like my players. I like their chemistry. They're great kids. They work hard. We have a saying at Rutgers, when you ring the bells, it means something great happened at Rutgers. And we hope this season we can ring the bells and do something great with our basketball team. And I want our guys, too, to enjoy the journey. I want our fans -- Rutgers nation is awesome. They're into it. Our season tickets are up. We've already sold out a few games at this time of the year, which is unbelievable.

Really, really excited, and we're trying to do something that we haven't done in a long time, and hopefully we've got that mindset and people will enjoy the journey of the season, because this season throws a lot of obstacles at you. We're at Pitt and then we are at Michigan State, and those are our first games, Seton Hall. We have a stretch there that's unbelievable, some of the best teams in the country all hit you in December. We're going to have to fight through a lot of adversity, but I think this team has the pieces.

Q. Your team was ranked 13th in the Big Ten in assists per game last season. What are your plans for moving the ball once Geo Baker is out of the game?

STEVE PIKIELL: You know, excited about some of the additions. We've also got a kid named Jacob Young who is a transfer from Texas, a point guard lefty, a little bit different than Geo, who can really move the ball and pass the ball. I think we were young last year. I think that was part of it. We didn't have a lot of depth at any position. Now I have Jacob Young as a point guard,

Paul Mulcahy is a point guard, Geo Baker is a point guard. And I tell you what, Ron Harper and Caleb McConnell, when they rebound, they're point guards, too.

I really feel like we've improved our passing and our depth in those areas a tremendous amount, and I think all 11 guys on my roster are going to play, and they're all important. And I think all 11 can be starters, so there's not a lot of drop-off we're going to have when we sub guys in.

But I think being able to move Geo around -- which I wasn't able to do last year, too -- I think is going to help his scoring, I think it's going to help him defensively. Jacob Young can sit down and guard people. Paul Mulcahy, a really good defender, Montez Mathis a really good defender, and Caleb McConnell a really good defender, Peter Kiss. So I feel really good about being able to move the ball. I like our post players a ton. I think we can throw the ball inside now and get some assists.

Feel like we've improved tremendously in that area and just have a lot more guys capable of getting assists for us.