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An Interview With:

BILL FENNELLY

PETER IRWIN: We have Coach Bill Fennelly from Iowa State. Coach, if you'd like to make some opening comments and then we'll take questions.

BILL FENNELLY: It's great to be back in Kansas City. I have great memories here. We're excited about coming back and hopefully we'll be a part of it for a long time in the spring. But we're like everyone else, excited to get the season started and looking forward to it. We appreciate everyone showing up today and covering all of our athletes and schools. It means a lot to all coaches that you would take the time to cover us. It means a lot and we sincerely appreciate it. We're looking forward to giving you something fun to write about, hopefully.

Q. You've got the longest tenure of anybody in the conference. Are we in an era where we won't see these coaches ten years plus at institutions? And tell us how the nature of it will change with all the new coaches coming in the Big 12 this year?

BILL FENNELLY: Well, I've been very lucky, obviously, to have a lot of good players and coaches and administration who appreciate what we're doing. It has been odd to see the turnover. I think the culture of college sports is you win or they're going to change coaches. There's a lot of money involved, there's a lot of pressure involved. And it used to be women's coaches were immune to that, and we're not anymore. And I think we live in a "what have you done for me lately" world, and you win, you're successful or they're going to find somebody else who they feel can do it. You see a lot of administrators change and when AD's change, the coaches change a lot of times after that.

I've been lucky to work where I'm working. Hopefully I can be there a little bit longer. You talk about our league. Coach Conrad, a Hall of Fame coach, leaves and we bring in a future Hall of Fame coach in Gail. And you go down the list on a lot of coaches on our league. Coach Washington, Coach Baird, Hall of Fame coaches, and Coach Sharp, and now you have a whole another list, the Sherri Coales and Kim Mulkeys. I think it says a lot of our league that Gail Goesten Kors left Duke to come to the Big 12.

Q. To expand on that a little bit more, there's a fairly new athletic director at Iowa State and the changes, talk about the commitment at the school there to advance in the sport and how you guys fit in within the conference?

BILL FENNELLY: I can honestly tell you, and this is my 13th year at Iowa State, and the commitment has been unbelievable, through two presidents, my third athletic director, Jamie Pollard has a great vision for what we want to do. He's a forward thinking guy, he wants to be a player in the league. If you don't get in the game you're going to get run over in this league. You better do some things, and you better spend money, you better build facilities, you better do things to allow your athletic programs and student athletes to be successful. So I can't complain one bit about the support that we've gotten in my time. And I think everyone understands how hard it is. We're in kind of a unique situation as far as our recruiting base. We don't have maybe the weather that some of the other schools have sometimes, but you have to have other things, commitment from the top, and our president has been unbelievable to me, and Jamie Pollard has followed suit. I don't have any complaints about that. Now it's time to get out and do your job.

The support of the administrators in this league is really, really good. And I think they see women's basketball can be important to their schools and important to our league.

Q. How much has Toccara been able to practice, and how is she doing?

BILL FENNELLY: Toccara actually practiced a little bit. We practiced three times. We didn't practice Friday, we gave them Friday off. We got off to a good start, we took the day off. Saturday and Sunday a little bit -- she practiced almost full go. Toccara Ross is our lone senior, she's been fighting a bad back, and hasn't done anything all fall. But she's a tough kid. She wants to play. She wants to be a part of this. We need her. I mentioned to my staff yesterday after practice that our practices were better because No. 41 was out there. I think she'll be fine. When you're fighting a bad back, there's no easy solution. But she's very tough minded. She wants to play. She wants to practice. And I was stunned how well she looked yesterday to be honest with you, for having not done as much as so many in the others in the fall. But we just have to be smart and keep her healthy and do the right things. It's a lot of work for her because she has to spend a lot of time in the training room to get ready for practice. If she can do that and we can be smart about using her in practice I think she'll be fine. Thanks for asking.

Q. Talk about being picked 6th in the preseason poll. Through the three days, anybody -- any surprises in your practices so far?

BILL FENNELLY: As far as being picked 6th, to be honest with you, I was surprised it was that high, to be quite honest with you, but I think you look at how teams are picked, I don't think there's any question that A&M and Oklahoma are dynamic teams and should be picked. After that, who knows what could happen. In our league, who do you get at home, who do you get on the road, who gets hurt. But the people that are bunched in the middle -- as far as surprises go, I think overall -- our three new kids have done pretty well, Kelsey Bolte, Genesis Lightbourne and Denae Stuckey have shown they can play at this level and compete. But probably the most pleasant surprise was Toccara practicing yesterday. That was probably the biggest surprise and the nicest one. I didn't expect it.

Q. As the Dean of the Big 12 women's coaches, you've seen a lot of talent come and go in this league. Talk about the impact of Oklahoma's Courtney Paris.

BILL FENNELLY: In my time coaching -- and you're right, I've seen a lot of great players in this league. I don't know that there's been a player that's changed this league and the dynamics of this country like Courtney Paris. And I mean that as a player and as a person. The way she conducts herself, the way she carries herself, the way she plays the game. I don't think she gets enough credit for how good she is. She's a hard guard. She's a big, strong kid and people think she's big and strong -- she's very talented. She passes, she catches. She's very well coached. I think she's brought a tremendous amount of attention not just to Oklahoma but to our league. And I don't know that there's a kid that we've ever played against in our league that's harder to prepare for. We have tried everything. We played them two years ago and triple teamed her and that was a great coaching decision, we got pummeled. And then we played them in the Big 12 Tournament and decided that another great coaching idea was we were going to let her score 35 -- I don't know how many she scored. We said let her keep shooting until her arm falls off and try not to give them any 3-point shots. That didn't work. So I don't know. She is -- she's a special talent. And unfortunately in the women's game she can't go pro early, so we're all stuck with her for two more years (laughter). But, again, I think the biggest thing is she's a quality kid. And I think she's humble. She cares about her teammates. She cares about the game. She represents our country in the USA Basketball. So it's not fun to coach against her but it's fun to say she's in our league, because she brings a lot of great attention to the Big 12. And I must have ticked somebody off the first Big 12 game Courtney Paris gets to come to Ames, so it's a great way to start the season.

Q. Can you talk about what kind of improvement you're expecting from Nicky?

BILL FENNELLY: Nicky is a third year start. She's a junior. I think the challenge for Nicky is like any player that's played and understands, she's got to find another level and not be satisfied with playing and scoring 12 or 13 points. We need her to be a better player. We need her to help with our players. Our top 8 players, top 7 players, three were probably new. She's been through it, she understands what it takes to be successful. Next year she'll be a senior. So she's someone that we need.

Everyone talks about leadership. And it's a relative term. But for Nicky it's someone that's been through it, and that's the thing. Unlike most players on our team, she's the only one that is a third-year starter. So she completely understands what it means to be successful in this league. For Nicky it's do you want to be a really good player, do you want to be an All-Conference player or do you want to settle for being a good college player? We didn't have anyone -- I told this to our kids. We didn't have anyone that was on the preseason Big 12 team. Obviously the coaches in our league don't think the players are very good. Nicky needs to prove to the coaches in our league that she deserves to be an all conference player. Either you do that or you don't. And that's the level. You go from sophomore to junior year. She's capable of making it and I hope she wants to do it.

Q. Obviously the faces have changed among the coaches and this is always regarded as a quality coaches league, but looking back, how much impact does a team from a league winning a national championship have on that conference's overall perception?

BILL FENNELLY: I don't think you can put it -- you can't put too much emphasis on it. I think what Baylor did changed our league forever. Because it's always one of those, you know, Peyton Manning is great, but he's never won a Super Bowl. We've had All-American players. We have coaches -- a litany of Hall of Fame coaches, some of the best players that have ever played in the game. The best fans. Some of the best universities. There's nothing we don't have, except for that. When Baylor did it, it's like, okay, we can get that out of the way and move on and let other schools go on. And I know Texas Tech did it. But I don't think there's any question about Oklahoma getting to the championship game in years past, and I think A&M and Oklahoma both have teams that could go to the Final Four again. When Baylor did that, it totally changed our league forever. And now there isn't anything that I can think of, obviously I'm not very bright, but I don't think there's anything I can think of that people can say that our league has not done or will not do, as soon as that happened. That was big for all of us.

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