

# Big Ten Basketball Media Days

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## Big Ten

Commissioner Press Conference

## Commissioner Tony Petitti



THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Both men and women you only have four black head coaches. You lost one from last year. It doesn't seem that the diversity is getting any better on the basketball side. Is that the conference's responsibility? Is it the schools' responsibility to try to move improvement in diversity, especially in the year 2024 and beyond?**

TONY PETITTI: Yes, good question. I think it's everybody's. I'm not going to isolate it to the conference or institutions or the NCAA or just coaches in terms of developing other coaches. I think it's everybody. I have felt that it is a priority.

The success, obviously we would like to be a lot better. I think if you look at the leadership in the Big Ten in terms of athletic directors and our COPC, it's very strong, and I think hopefully we can continue to do things to make sure that diversity is a focus on coaching hires.

I will say that some of this is cyclical. It does change up and down. Coaches have success or they don't, and it leads to the hiring and coaching changes. I think it's partly pipeline, developing assistants, opportunity.

And I can tell you, I feel very strongly that administrators want to hire the best coaches, and head coaches want to hire the best staffs. I think that's the goal, to go out there and hire the best people, make sure you have opportunity.

The game, football and basketball, is very diverse, and that should lead to more coaching. There's no doubt about that.

**Q. In what ways can the Big Ten and sports in general capitalize off the popularity of women's basketball and take it to another level?**

TONY PETITTI: I think a lot of it is the exposure and growing. When you see the success -- you have networks and some broadcast partners making decisions about how

to program where to put games, and I think those that put games on broadcast and gave games more exposure were rewarded with great results. What that does, having been on that side of the house, it just creates copycat behavior.

So now program executives at networks and our partners all across are just more likely to make those decisions going forward. So you are seeing an increase in broadcast exposure in the Big Ten on the women's side. That will lead to continued growth, we believe.

I think also it's expectations. Look, we set multiple records. It seemed like almost every week we were setting a broadcast record. That's an unfair standard going forward. Having said that, what we care about is does that success lead to more opportunity? The numbers might not hit the same every week, but overall I think what I'm seeing across from broadcast partners, our partners across is a new renewed commitment to women's basketball. It was proven success, so it could happen again.

I think we'll see more and more of it. Our job in the conference is to work with our partners to encourage them to do it, to make sure they do it. I think we've done some things scheduling with times of games, opportunities, how things are programmed, so the conference office, we're really trying to be as aggressive as we can and make sure those schedule decisions happen.

I feel really good that we partners that really want to invest in women's basketball.

**Q. Just following up on that, I wanted to ask, obviously one thing that everybody is picked up on is Caitlin Clark was a really big part of bringing attention to women's basketball versus the NCAA. I guess not just Iowa, but for the conference in general, what do you think is -- what has the league done to make sure the focus stays on women's basketball, and it's not just like Caitlin Clark was here and now she's in the WNBA, and the attention is starting to...**

TONY PETITTI: Good question. It's making sure we program games in the places where they can have the most success. It just comes down to broadcast windows,



trying to get on over the air as much as possible, using cable, telling the right stories, making sure that when we have those opportunities, we're putting together the best matchups, the most compelling matchups. We feel good about the league. It's extremely deep so fortunately we have the ability to put a lot of good games on.

It's growing off what you did. I can promise you from having spent a lot of time on the broadcast side that when something works, people just keep -- they do more of it. It's just human nature on that side, so you'll see more of this.

Now hopefully the fact that the game is healthy and the bar has been raised and interest has been raised so that you hope a lot of that is sticking and people keep coming back and that we keep growing the base. Then when you have these break-out moments, break-out games, break-out players, you keep growing from there.

There is no doubt what happened at Iowa elevated all of women's college basketball, and it's happening in other places in the NCAA and other conferences, other programs. We're in a really good position, and we feel -- and I give Iowa credit. They did things to make sure -- you know, having the outdoor game and 55,000 people, right? When you see something working, you get more creative.

It's our job to keep doing that.

**Q. In terms of the bigger picture of college athletics... (no microphone.)**

TONY PETITTI: We think about across all of our sports, how do we take them and look at each individually, and I think what's happened in basketball on the women's side is it's given us the opportunity to really pay attention to it as a single entity.

As you think about making broadcast deals or how you schedule, like, I think the emphasis in the conference office is to really think of all of our sports now just as a separate scheduling. What's the best possible schedule for that sport? Every sport is unique in terms of its own postseason format, the history of it, how you schedule it, the new members, their history coming into the Big Ten.

As you said, we've got really strong programs coming into the Big Ten in women's basketball, so the league has just gotten a lot deeper and more competitive. It's our job to make sure. We want to make sure we have the right opportunities. We want to get as many teams as we can in the NCAA Tournament to reward the competitive aspect of play in the Big Ten.

So I think it's -- I can just tell you the amount of resources and time that we're spending in the office on women's basketball is significant. I can't really speak to what it was before, but I can tell you our current staff, it's a huge point of emphasis. There is an opportunity to grow, and I feel that way about a lot of the things happening in the Big Ten on the woman's side. Not just women's basketball, but there is a great opportunity here.

You see success, and you see that people came to it and liked it and came back, and you saw what happened in the championship game in the NCAA last year. That just proves that it can happen. It's now our job to make sure we put ourselves in a position to keep doing that, and the league is extremely deep, as you know.

**Q. In the past years there's been a lot of conference games relegated to Big Ten Plus streaming. Have your broadcast partners come back and said we know what our contract said, but we want more product? Has that happened?**

TONY PETITTI: It's happened on the broadcast side. We'll have a record number of broadcast exposures in the Big Ten this year on over the air TV, and that's a direct relation to the success last year. It just leads to more programming.

You're going to see more -- that just has a carry-down effect because that just moves more games to Big Ten Network, more games to our partners, and then across and games move back and forth off of Big Ten Plus.

When it starts -- when more games move to the broadest distribution, it impacts everything else and makes it more positive. I think you'll continue to see that.

The other thing that's really good about the environment right now is the standard for networks about what's considered success has changed, right? Network TV looks a lot different than it did a few years ago. What network executives are finding is this is a very consistent way of reaching good audiences, and so the standard has changed. So the appetite for doing more is growing. Fortunately for us, we're deep enough that we can program a lot of windows.

**Q. Increased travel for all the teams this year. When this is over, what things will you be looking to see how you can (no microphone)? What highlights are you looking for?**

TONY PETITTI: Yeah, we talk a lot about this in the office because I've been involved in scheduling in lots of different places throughout my career, and I've always viewed

scheduling as something -- I use the words in the office if it's a living thing, you have to be able to adjust and react to it and understand what you did.

Look, we had to make some decisions in the first year about how we scheduled, not just in women's basketball, across everything.

The key thing is that being honest about what you get right and being willing to change what you don't, and I will say that the first place you go for that is your coaches. So we have executive group of our coaches. We have a small subgroup that we talk to first. Then we go to the full group, and scheduling will be a big part of that.

They understand how their players react. They understand the competitive balance. So we take that format in and Megan and the team and Becky, they'll get that feedback and then we'll decide whether we've done things right.

I'm optimistic that we've hopefully gotten all of it right. That's probably overly optimistic. Hopefully we got most of it right. And then we make the adjustments that we have to after you take the feedback.

Because if you go in thinking that you're going to get it all right, this is really complicated. I think we've done a really good job of trying to minimize the travel. Obviously figuring out how do we make those trips, how do you make paired trips while you're out, all of those things. Maybe there's a better format out there. So we'll see.

For now we feel pretty comfortable where we are, but we've committed to our coaches that we will study this after and have those conversations with them.

**Q. Back on the scheduling, Minnesota will now host USC and UCLA. (No microphone). Is there any looking to the future making sure that every team gets at least one of the games for every team in the conference?**

TONY PETITTI: Yeah, you're getting into the real detail where I'll just defer to our staff that do that. I think that's the goal.

Look, we face that across. You want to make sure that student-athletes, when they come in and play in the Big Ten, that they're seeing everybody, home and away, during their time in the conference. That's a key part of the way we think about scheduling.

What you are talking about, this could be the rub of the way they built the schedule in terms of just Minnesota not seeing USC and UCLA this year. That's probably something that's very unlikely to happen again. They're

two-year windows, right? And we can get you more. Megan can walk you through more details of the scheduling process if you want, if that's helpful.

**Q. Would you clarify for the Big Ten tournament how many teams will qualify?**

TONY PETITTI: 15.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

TONY PETITTI: The 15 decision obviously there was a lot of conversation with coaches about it. I think it's just the way of staging the event. There's a lot of balancing forces. How many days you play, how teams arrive coming off of playing across, protecting your top seeds, giving them the best chance to be successful in the tournament. So it was just a combination decision.

I go back to the same thing about that. I think we're comfortable with 15. There's been a lot of back and forth on it. That's where we are now. It might be there's a lot of talk about do you have an all-comers tournament and what's the best way to do it?

I think we're doing the same on the men's and women's side of 15, and I think we feel like that's the right way to get through the week, to have the right number of games. Obviously we've expanded it to the right number of days. Also remembering that you still want to make sure your top programs are successful as they advance into the NCAA Tournament and give them the best chance to be successful.

**Q. On the balance of the schedule, about the women's schedule in particular, every team is playing every team. (No microphone.) A rivalry setup. Was that the determining factor that everybody would play everybody at least once rather than regionalize it?**

TONY PETITTI: Look, you want to connect the league, right? Playing everybody is really important. I think a big thing if you had gone to divisions or do things that's more regional-based, you kind of lose the connectivity of everybody playing everybody.

I think the format that we've got gives you the opportunity to see everybody. I think that's better. That's where we are today. I think it makes a lot more sense. We've done that across a lot of the things that we've scheduled. ^ the idea of trying to -- that people talk about how do you integrate the new members?

Well, the best way to do it is everybody has to see everybody as much as possible. That's the fastest way to

grow rivalries and connect everybody because you can't predict when you are doing that where the best games are necessarily going to be down the road.

If you can at least guarantee that you are seeing everybody, it gives you a better head start that you're not missing something.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

TONY PETITTI: It's largely been a coach's thing. There's been discussion about that. I think it's related a lot to postseason qualification and RPI and how people think about the competitiveness of the schedule, but something that we talk about.

I'm not sure there's a perfect answer other than it's probably preference among the coaching group right now.

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