

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 6, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Iowa Hawkeyes

Jan Jensen

Ava Heiden

Lucy Olsen

Postgame Press Conference

Iowa - 74, Michigan State - 61

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with the Iowa portion of this press conference. We have Coach Jan Jensen, players Ava Heiden and Lucy Olsen.

Coach, if you would make an opening statement, we'll open it up for questions for the student-athletes.

JAN JENSEN: I'm beyond proud of this group. I think back when we all got together in June. They've just been a really joyous group to coach. A lot of youth, 8 out of our 13 were new. Big shoes, big shadows, all the things. Had a great non-con, hit some adversity, but it never barked, right?

We've been having some fun in February. We thought we were poised to have a nice, exciting moments in March. So that's what we've been talking a lot about. But March is madness, right? So you're never guaranteed moments like this.

But if there's a group that's been working and been believing and been relentless in their pursuit of chasing fun and chasing success, it's been this group. I'm just so thankful they've had a moment like this tonight.

Obviously we understand we've got three big games left to play, but I'm a big believer in the stop and smell the roses. Tonight we get to do that for a bit. They get to do it a little longer. Our staff will turn it over by 11:00.

Q. For both players, can you talk about the challenge -- Iowa had a very definite identity the last couple seasons. Can you talk about the challenge this year of you guys establishing your own identity? Did that take



a while, and is that what we've seen happen the last couple of months?

LUCY OLSEN: Yeah, Iowa's been great the past couple years, and a lot of people graduated. We got a new coach, so we had to find our own identity for sure.

Five new freshmen, I'm new, a lot of people starting have new roles as well. At the beginning of the season, we were trying to figure out our identity and had a lot of moving pieces. But now we found it. Yeah, it just took some time.

Q. Ava, obviously you played a big role today in the win. Towards the end of the third and even into the fourth, just you as a first-year player to be put on the big stage like this and to produce when Hannah's having foul trouble, how do you stay so composed and stay within yourself in a big moment like this?

AVA HEIDEN: I think all the reps I've been putting in in the dark have been helping a lot with that. Just waiting for my opportunity and working towards it. So that when I do get that, I can shine.

Q. To follow up on that, Ava -- I'm sorry, I hope this isn't too redundant, but has it been at all difficult -- I'm sure you've been used to playing a lot of ball. You've got the definition of a role player this season, but has it been difficult waiting for a chance to have moments like you had tonight?

AVA HEIDEN: I think every freshman goes through this. It's definitely a roller coaster, a lot of ups and downs, and going from being the best player in high school to everyone around me is great. So learning to navigate that and just putting the work in every day, so I can create that separation for myself.

Q. For either of you players, there's been a couple instances, especially midway through the season where Iowa hasn't really been able to close the deal. You've had a lead, they've come back, and it hasn't ended well for you guys. I think tonight we kind of saw that after Ava, you get them kind of this lead in the third quarter, you guys basically rode that momentum



all the way through the end. Can either of you talk me through how that happened, and what do you think has changed since you last played these guys?

LUCY OLSEN: We worked a lot in practice about different situations, so I think that's helped. And all of the games we lost previously, we learned a lot of lessons from that as well. Ava's spark got us going, and we just didn't want to lose that game.

I think we all came together collectively and made sure that didn't happen again.

Q. Lucy, followed you through the Big East, and now you're at Iowa. Not only are you training new players in the program, but now there's USC, UCLA, the whole nine yards, the West Coast teams. Talk a little bit about your transition from playing Connecticut to playing the elite part of the country with the Big Ten.

LUCY OLSEN: Every game's competitive. We haven't had an easy one. We know that each team's going to be tough, I think. The Big East was similar, but this is just a different level. We have such a great team that we're competitive with everyone as well.

Q. Ava, how rewarding or gratifying was it after all those reps in the dark to have the crowd go crazy for you when you checked out at 4:51 in the fourth quarter and to chant your name -- "Ava, Ava, Ava" -- with those free throws in the final minute?

AVA HEIDEN: Yeah, I had that happen in high school a little bit, but this was definitely a different level, as Lucy said. It was very enjoyable and it was cool to see all that work pay off.

Q. In the beginning of the third, we don't see you kind of lash out the way you did with Lucy and Hannah picking up the fouls. You had to kind of calm yourself down, but just to know that you got players on the bench, especially freshmen that could step up in moments like that and kind of produce the way you should expect them to. How good does that feel, and going forward, how does that build trust for you to kind of fill them in when you really need them to?

JAN JENSEN: I don't think any coach -- I was hot. I don't like to get that hot. I'm working on it. I did thank them in the locker room for making that a win with my first tech and whatnot. I think sometimes, if I was going to get one, it's as good a time as any.

Just sometimes you see it differently than the refs, and I certainly did. I think this group is -- well, they're just a good

group. They're gritty. They're fun. They're pretty level headed. I don't really -- I've really never had to really get on them, raise my voice to them specifically.

I wasn't the best example tonight of getting composed with the refs, but I told them let me do that, and you guys need to do your jobs. I thought they did a really good job in the second half not trying to coach the refs.

I was really proud of them. I'm glad it worked out. Sometimes you have those moments. This is my first time in this chair. Sometimes, when I've gotten hot, I haven't really liked it, earlier in the season. I'm learning and growing in that.

This particular time, you kind of take a gamble a little bit. I'm not saying I was orchestrating it, but I was frustrated. So I'm fortunate that we got the W.

Q. You had a lot of coaching decisions to make in the second half there with the foul trouble. How did you feel like you managed Lucy's situation? And then what gave you the confidence to go to Ava in that situation? Obviously it was a good stroke.

JAN JENSEN: That's a good question. I really trust Lucy. I felt like we needed to go with her with two fouls a little bit towards the end of that half.

She's been there. She's a senior. I was pretty confident that she wasn't going to do anything. I said, I just need you to orchestrate it. I don't need you to score. I don't need you to steal. I need you to orchestrate this offense and just give everybody a calm going in. She pretty much did it, and we got her out.

Ava has always been, she's a matchup person, and I thought her answer was really honest and fair. Any freshman that's been great, it's hard on all of them. You can ask Robyn, you can ask Geno Auriemma, you can ask Dawn Staley, consistency is the key, right? What I've told Ava, the game is bigger, faster, stronger, and your time will come.

This was a matchup, I told our staff I wanted to see her -- I think she's a baby VanSlooten, right? They play similarly. They're wiry. Grace is a little bit bigger, but I think that's what I kind of like about our post. You have Hannah, and then you have Addy's size, and I gave Addy a shot. We couldn't utilize what Addy gives you. We needed to throw it to Addy so Addy could score because she's bigger, and if you get her at the short, the elbow, or the block, but their pressure was so great, so it negates what Addy can give.

But I do believe in consistency of productivity. What I see

in practice, what I sat in practice, and Addison's also been there. So she got the shot. We couldn't utilize her, and I knew Ava would be ready because sometimes when you have to be so patient, you don't always agree with the waiting process. If you get them confident enough and they get an opportunity, you hope that's how they're going to respond.

So I'm extremely proud of her, and I'm very excited about the future if she'll continue to work like she has.

Q. Talking about Ava, she's progressed throughout the season. She's had some games where she's looked really good. Tonight with foul trouble with Hannah, she comes in and in 12 minutes, almost half a dozen rebounds, 11 points. On the block, I've never seen her look so confident or been able to get in position this year. You've already talked about it numerous times tonight, but really going into next year, how does it make you feel for tomorrow and into the NCAA Tournament that you now have an option, if Hannah's got four fouls, it's not like what am I going to do or how are we going to work around this? You've got somebody that now she wants the ball down there.

JAN JENSEN: Yeah, I'm not surprised because I had a conversation before our last game. I met with her and just continued to lay out the plan. She's a real smart kid, highly intelligent. She gets it. I'd always put the challenges ahead of her.

She had put in the work. She's been working very much harder since the Big Ten started. So I just knew when we needed her, I felt like I would be comfortable to give her a shot. I am so thrilled that she was able to answer like she did.

Q. Jan, I know you're getting a lot of Ava questions, but were you just hoping for her to help you get to the end of the quarter, or were you hoping maybe for more that she could go seven, eight minutes?

JAN JENSEN: No, I've been pushing our staff because that matchup was the right matchup for VanSlooten because Hannah gives up a little size, but at the end we had -- you could have Hannah sometimes guarding 40, Ayrault, and you could have Ava guarding VanSlooten. The only thing is she's a freshman.

But if we could go and get that in there, but I didn't want to try to score and get them in foul trouble. Addy's a bigger -- she's a known commodity, if you can get Addy open at the short or at the block. Then I told Randi we need to go, we need to counter that. I was hopeful. I didn't know for sure she was going to produce like that, but I was all about her

going for as long as she could because her athleticism and her bounce is really similar to VanSlooten, and I like that matchup.

In fact, Ava played when we played there. I don't know for sure, but she played the most minutes this whole season when we played at Michigan State December 13th. She did a solid job. Not like this, but she was coming.

Q. You guys play Ohio State tomorrow, very talented team. Kind of just wondering what the keys are tomorrow to beating them and advancing in this tournament.

JAN JENSEN: Man, Jaloni, I'll tell you what, she's tremendous. Cotie McMahon, tremendous. All of them, man, they're just really explosive, they're powerful, they press. We're going to have to really handle ball screen action. Cotie is just really hard to stop. She can score inside. She hit a ton of threes against Michigan State.

I haven't watched them as recently, but we played them, what, three or four games ago. We have to handle their press. We have to handle their speed. Jaloni got downhill on us real fast, real often there, and I don't know if anybody's been able to really slow her down. So we're going to have to try to figure out how to minimize that. We're going to have to score a little bit more efficiently than we did tonight.

I know those two in particular are really big keys, and I'm probably forgetting someone right now. But when I get out of here and I look at my scout, I'll be like, oh, geez, I hope I didn't disrespect them. Just right now my mind is on the green and white team.

Q. I think a lot of times this season when we've seen freshmen come in, it's usually people when we need a ball handler, you've got to guard on foul trouble with Stremlow and Guyton. It's easy to forget sometimes that Heiden was a top 40 prospect in her class. What's one thing you want to see her moving forward in the program past her first season, especially when you've got someone like O'Grady in her last season at Iowa?

JAN JENSEN: I think just consistency. That's what you want to see with your team as it progresses. With Ava's growth, post players in high school, they really aren't challenged as much. There's very few people that big. There's very few people who are either as fast or as strong.

The summer circuit is the summer circuit, right? You've just got to see the consistency, and I just love the challenge that was set before her a couple months ago. So that's what I'm hoping. But I don't doubt it. She's an

extremely hard working. She's talented. I think she'll be willing to continue to grow.

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THE MODERATOR: Joining us for the Michigan State portion of the press conference, Coach Robyn Fralick, Julia Ayrault, and Grace VanSlooten. Coach, if you would just give an opening statement.

ROBYN FRALICK: A lot of credit to Iowa. I think they're playing really good basketball. I thought they obviously finished the game well.

For us, we're disappointed. I think it's the most turnovers we've had all season. Fouled too much, fouled just even when it wasn't an attacking play and just put people at the free-throw line. So I think those two things are things we know that have to change for us moving forward.

But I loved our effort. I think our kids played really hard. Took a lead in the second half off of playing hard, moving the ball better and playing hard. The way we finished the fourth was frustrating, and there are things we know moving into the NCAA Tournament we're going to have time to work on and we will.

Q. Julia, the matchup, let's talk about the season, you had a great season, you got a good seed here. Talk a little bit about the game and how you thought it went from start to finish and some of your good runs during the game.

JULIA AYRAULT: Kind of like Coach touched on, turnovers killed us before the first media timeout. Just dug ourselves a little hole. I was really proud of our fight. I think we showed that all year, just kind of sticking with it, and we made a good run and kind of let it slip away, kind of like Coach said towards the end.

Just definitely proud of our fight. I think we showed that always, and I think that's something we really just are proud of as a team, and I think we've just got to make sure we don't get ourselves in that hole to begin with and it looks like a different ballgame for us.

Just kind of moving forward this week with that and working towards kind of not letting that happen.

Q. In the second quarter Iowa got a run on you. Was there anything they were doing differently defensively as you were running the offense?

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: I think the paint was really packed. That was difficult. Honestly, I think a lot of the turnovers that happened are forced and completely our fault. I think that's disappointing. I don't necessarily think that their defense had that much to affect us or whatever.

I think the paint was really clogged and us not moving the ball makes it really hard to score. A lot of things to work on for sure.

Q. Grace, talk about while you're here the difference between Oregon and Michigan State, how this year's gone for you.

GRACE VANSLOOTEN: Yeah, it's gone great. I'm really happy here. It's a different culture. Everyone works hard. We all want to win and really competitive. I think I've developed well too since I've been here. I'm really happy with my choice.

Q. Julia, obviously finishing up a career here. How do you feel heading into these next ten days? So many teams in this league are predicted to be able to go into the NCAA Tournament. What's your focus going to be here as you get ready for hopefully what will be an announcement that will be very pleasing to you and your team?

JULIA AYRAULT: Just kind of we talked a lot in the locker room about we have a good week to focus on us and work on the things that we need to work on.



So just looking forward to this week and kind of working with each other and improving on the things we need to focus on. Just excited to be in the tournament. Obviously that's always a tremendous honor.

We worked all season for that, so just kind of focusing on what's next. Just hopefully making a little run once we get there and obviously very excited to be in the tournament and put ourselves in position to do that.

Q. Coach, anything you really want to work on between and the NCAA Tournament even though you've had a great season?

ROBYN FRALICK: I think we're going to have a good time between now and the end of the season, there's so many games stacked on top of each other, it can be hard to really get back to yourself. I think this week we'll learn a lot from this game, and we'll have time to really focus in on us and sharpen up.

I shared, like playing hard matters, but we've got to be able to play smarter. We've got to be able to put both together, especially in these types of games.

Q. Now that you've gone through the conference, talk about the addition with USC, UCLA, Oregon, Washington, and just the travel and everything that went with it every way.

ROBYN FRALICK: Yeah, we added four NCAA Tournament teams, which is a pretty big addition, two top-five teams. Obviously really upped the level of the league.

I think the travel, it is what it is. For us it's not a huge difference. I think for certain teams it is.

But we always share with our team, when it's time to hoop, we hoop, right? If it's morning, night, West Coast, East Coast, central time, that's our mentality around it.

The additions of the teams made our league -- we went from a really good league to an absolutely unbelievable league.

Q. Talking a little bit about the game, you really didn't turn the ball over very much for a game as intense as this was. You want to talk about your ball handling and how well you guys went about that?

ROBYN FRALICK: We turned it over a lot. We had 24 turnovers, which was, I think, the most we had all season. I thought that was a huge problem. I think some of it, credit

to Iowa, they've been good defensively this season.

Then I think we were just so sped up. I don't know if we were just so excited by the magnitude of the game, but we just got so sped up. That makes the game hard when you have to take care of the ball. You have to get shots.

Q. You talked about the improvement and the depth of the league, and one of the questions that different coaches have answered is, when you have teams that are fighting, even at the lower end of the conference, every game and every game matters, whether it's to get into the postseason here or onto the NCAA. How do you as a coach, especially when not everyone gets to come to the conference tournament, how do you as a coach go about facing teams that are playing for their entire season all throughout the schedule you have and you're really not getting a night off from a game that's important not only to you but the other team as well?

JAN JENSEN: I think you have to choose crazy. It's a joke.

It's what you choose. It's the challenge. The challenge is incredible, and it's night in and night out, and every game has a lot of weight behind it. Every game is really hard. I think every matchup is really challenging. It's what you choose when you're playing at the highest level and I believe the best league in the country. That's what you get.

That's also, we share that with our team. This is what we've chosen. There's a commitment that comes with it. There's a discipline that comes with it. There's a constant expectation that comes with it.

We like those things. I think we all wake up a little better when we know those are things that are important.

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