



## 2015 Big Ten Basketball Media Day

Thursday, October 15, 2015

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### Northwestern Coach Joe McKeown

**COACH McKEOWN:** You know, just excited to get the year going. We had a great breakthrough year last year where I felt like we won 13 Big Ten games. I think the school record is 23 games. And got in the top 20. I think it's just helped elevate our program.

And, you know, the people we have returning have paid their dues in the Big Ten. They've gone through a lot of the ups and downs, snowstorms. So we feel like we have some of the premier players in the league in Nia Coffey and Maggie Lyon.

And so, you know, again, I want to practice players. They just want to play games right now. So we're kind of at that point. I don't know who is going to win.

But, yeah, really excited about our team. Had an opportunity, you know, to spend some time with USA Basketball this summer in Korea. And it really helped me kind of look at our team a little different too and just prepare as we change rules too and go to four quarters. So we're going to try to use all those experiences.

The last thing I will say, it's just a great time to be at Northwestern right now with what Chris Collins is doing, Jim Phillips, our AD, Pat Fitzgerald. So it's kind of rejuvenated everybody. So it's good to be a Wildcat.

**Q. You just made a comment about your time with USA Basketball and how that made you look at your team differently. Can you expand upon that a little bit? And then a second part of that question would be: You've often talked in the past about your team -- being the team that nobody wants to play because they were afraid that, you know, you were going to knock them off. Well, I think you're not a secret anymore. So how do you approach that differently this year?**

**COACH McKEOWN:** Yeah, thanks. I think the first part, in USA Basketball, you have 12 players that you have about a week to blend together and become a team and try to bond. And what I learned too, when you're USA, the rest of the world wants to beat you.

So I thought, it kind of gave me that chip on our shoulder that I want our players to have, that, we're Northwestern and we're still fighting for respect, even though we're not a secret anymore. I just wanted them to have that attitude and that mentality that it's -- you know, that we still got a lot of work to do and let's keep all the noise out. I think they're buying in.

**Q. Coach, with that being said, your team was voted third by the coaches. So the respect is gaining, obviously, in that regard, but with that being said, with Nia Coffey and the leadership that she brings, are there any other leaders that have emerged so far early on this season in practices?**

**COACH McKEOWN:** You know, when I took the job, we were voted 12th, and there was 11 teams in the league. And that's where we were. And, you know, now -- got to take some of these things with a grain of salt, so we're trying to keep grounded. But also I want them to enjoy it too.

And then from a leadership standpoint, with Nia, she's just one of those -- she's really humble. She's the most humble great player I think I've ever seen.



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And then Maggie Lyon is a special player for us and a captain and somebody that, you know, has had 25, 30 points in a Big Ten game. Probably doesn't get the recognition. Maybe the most underrated player in the Big Ten and is just so capable of, you know, putting the team on her back, certain parts of the game. Great shooter, and just a tough hard-nosed kid. So I'm looking to her -- and she's a senior. She's been a four-year starter. And she was the Big Ten Freshman of the Year. So she's really matured into her role and just has respect of everybody at Northwestern.

**Q. Congratulations from getting out of 12th, first of all, Coach.**

**COACH McKEOWN:** Better than 13th.

**Q. Right. Taking a look at that, what is the biggest change that has to happen? When you think about the Marylands and the Ohio States and the Michigan States that are up there in that top echelon, when you go into practice, what is that one key thing that has to be there from your team?**

**COACH McKEOWN:** I think the biggest thing is you got to be consistent. You can't play great one night -- this league has become -- obviously, the 14 on their home courts are really, really tough. So you got to play well on the road, and you just got to practice with some type of chip on your shoulder because everybody can beat everybody from top to bottom. And, you know, that's played out over the last couple of years.

But to be consistent, you know, and just to send a message that, you know, practice today is going to help you in the middle of January when you play Minnesota on the road or Ohio State or -- you know, and sometimes those things are hard, you know. Players have their own -- go through some ups and downs. And this group is good.

But, again, we keep preaching being consistent as much as we can and being fearless because when you're Northwestern and you have 8,000 students and you're in a league where the average school probably has 50,000 students, 40,000. People look at us as an underdog too, and we want to use that to our advantage.

**Q. Coach, you had the most wins last season in the past decade at Northwestern and you have four returning starters. How does that affect your confidence level going into the season?**

**COACH McKEOWN:** I think for them -- for a coaching staff, you know, our coaches know the pitfalls of what it's like in this conference. So, you know, you can't get ahead of yourself. Looking at your schedule, we're trying to figure out how to make this trip or that trip. But I think for our players, they just feel like they belong. They feel like we finished fourth last year, and got a double bye in the Big Ten Tournament. And it just gave them some confidence that -- especially the ones that have been playing for a while that are juniors, now seniors. They've also been on the other side. They know what it's like. It's not much fun to be getting beat on the road, too. So I think confidence-wise, I think they're in a good place.

**Q. What do you think about the rules changes that are coming into this season? And do you like them? And what do you think?**

**COACH McKEOWN:** You know, the four quarters, I was fortunate enough to play seven or eight games in the World University Games. So it gave me -- I got a little bit of a summer league head start, so to speak. And I think coaches will adjust. We have great coaches in our games, so I think you got to go through it. I think that the nonconference season will help everybody.



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You know, we're trying to do some of the things in practice a little bit, but some of the bigger rules, advancing the ball at the end of the game. The four quarters thing I think will run itself out. Players will adjust, because, you know, that's what they do.

And the timeouts -- I think coaches will adjust. And so I think you got to go through it for a year, and then when we're sitting here next year hopefully say, "Hey, that was a terrible idea or that was, you know, or that was great."

I couldn't tell you. It didn't -- when I did it this summer, it was fine. You just had to get used to your substitution patterns. And there were a couple of quirky things to it that you had to make sure you understood. But we have great coaches. I think they'll all adjust to it, and players want to -- I think players would play five quarters if you'd let them.

I just want to thank everybody for coming out and Hall of Famer Mel Greenberg there who's done more for women's basketball than probably most people would ever know. But, again, thanks for your support. Go Wildcats.