

Pac-12 Women's Basketball Media Day

Monday, October 7, 2019



Lynne Roberts

Kiana Moore

Dru Gylten

Utah Utes

LYNNE ROBERTS: It's hard for me to believe this is my fifth year at Utah. I swear it's like year two, it feels like. So it's exciting. This is our first -- as a staff, kind of our first team that we recruited everybody, so there's always kind of an awareness of that. And I think coming off of certainly a year that ended not the way we thought it would, but definitely a year that had a lot of positives and firsts and a lot of momentum in the right direction, we're excited about the year.

I know everyone has sat up here and said the same thing. Everyone is undefeated and has all their goals and dreams ahead of them. So it's certainly an exciting time. We're no different in that. I like our group a lot. It feels like our culture is definitely in place. So now we just got to put it to work and put our money where our mouth is a little bit this season.

Q. Lynne, what kind of building blocks do you feel like you guys laid last season to take into this season?

LYNNE ROBERTS: I think for the first time since Utah has joined the Pac-12 -- I think on the women's basketball side, we had always kind of been on the outside looking in. And that was something that I was determined to change and still am determined to change, and I think we kind of got some legitimacy, some national relevance. We were nationally ranked, and everything has just kind of improved over the four years.

Our recruiting has improved, our attendance is up 500 percent over the last four years. Like everything is just getting better. And I think coming off of last year, it ended not the way we envisioned, but there's so many -- it's so tempting to not think of it as the year of what could have been, and we have to switch that and kind of flip the coin and say the year of so many things that were firsts, and that's the natural progression.

In sports, we're impatient. Coaches are the most guilty of it. Players are, sportswriters are, fans are. Everybody is impatient. You want it now, and I think we

just have to tap the brakes a little bit and realize that we have every year gotten better, and this year I intend to build on those blocks and get better even yet.

Q. You graduate a ton of talent, and you've got a lot of talent coming back. Keys to the car go to Dru with Erika gone? Help us understand back court and front court with noticeable absences but really good folks coming back.

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, I'm not ready to give the keys to the car out yet, but -- I'm kidding. Yes. I'm kidding.

Yeah, so we did, we graduated Huffy, WNBA draft pick, you don't replace those -- like I've said all day, it's not a zero sum game where somebody graduates and you bring in a freshman and they get replaced. But we do have tremendous freshmen. You don't replace a four-year starter at point guard, Erika Bean with just one player. I think Dru will -- yes, she will get the keys to the car and be a tremendous leader, point guard, all those things for us. But we've got some young guys, too, that are going to be able to play and fill in those holes, too.

I do like our balance. I think we actually have this word I've heard about that's called depth. We haven't had that. We actually have it. So I'm excited about that. But yeah, so I think we did lose Huffy, we did lose Bean, we lost a couple others, but so did everybody else in this league. Think how many great seniors graduated and are still playing or whatever. We're no different in that regard.

Q. (Indiscernible) help us understand how huge that is.

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, so we're very fortunate to get Daneesha Provo back. Her situation was little bit unique. She transferred from Clemson after her freshman year. She was actually our first recruit at Utah, sat out that first year, and then tore her ACL, I think, the last day in 2018 in December. And she just had a unique situation where we were able to kind of get a waiver for another extended clock, so she gets another year. And that will just be a tremendous boost for us. How many times do you get an All-Conference player, and she's not cleared to play yet. So we're not sure when she'll be back, but it'll certainly be before conference play. And when we do get her -- she averaged 14 points a game last year, just to get that, that will certainly buoy our offense and defense when

she does get back. So huge.

And I think the silver lining of her not being back yet is we're going to be forced to develop some of the young guys. They're going to get to play, get their feet wet, and then you add Daneesha, that's a really nice luxury to have.

Q. What was your biggest takeaway from the program for you, and why did you want to institute this sort of mindset on your Utes?

LYNNE ROBERTS: Thank you for the questions. For those of you that don't know, we do this thing called the program. That's their name for it. And they're kind of a bunch of ex-military guys that come into your program, and they take over your team for a couple days and they get you -- they do things with your players that you're unable to do in terms of get them of their comfort zone, doing kind of military-style training. It's not as crazy as it sounds, although there's a little bit of craziness to it.

And it really exposes instantly who your leaders are, what things you need to clean up, toughness -- physical toughness, mental toughness -- discipline, the ability to listen, and do all the things in the -- they'll say in battle -- in a game that you need to be able to do. So it's awesome.

I think who I am as a coach, who Utah is as a sports program across the board, it's kind of that blue collar, we're going to outwork you, which is -- with them, it kind of resonates the same kind of thing with the program. But great book, really cool program. We've enjoyed it. They're on year 3. They have no idea what's coming for year 4. You just wait, Dru.

DRU GYLTEN: I can't wait.

Q. I'd like to get your ladies' take on -- if you went through the program, what it was like for you this year. And then also I was hoping you could talk about Kemery Martin. And you talked about how attendance numbers are up, what will having a local girl of that talent do to attendance numbers in the future?

DRU GYLTEN: Yeah, so we have done it now for three years. Each year brings something different. Like she said, it kind of exposes you to your weaknesses but also your strengths. So I feel like, even though it's not necessarily on the basketball court, I know that we've focused a lot on leadership. So they push you to be louder, command more from the freshmen, which will eventually help on the floor. So it's kind of a unique experience to get yourself out of your comfort zone and challenge yourself mentally and physically in a non-basketball way.

KIANA MOORE: Yeah, I think our newcomers did a great job, just embracing it all, and Dru and I, we were kind of the leaders of the program while we were doing it, and also Mo Corbin or Maurane Corbin. We call her Mo.

But yeah, so we stepped up as leaders, and it really got us out of our comfort zones when things got tough. Dru and I just kind of stuck our feet in the sand and kept it moving.

I think -- like I said, I think our newcomers did a great job with embracing it all and taking all those new lessons, and I think it'll be incorporated into our season this year.

Q. Can you expand on anything in particular that kind of as a team got everybody out of their comfort zone, like a certain drill or anything?

DRU GYLTEN: Well, on our Saturday morning, we woke up pretty early, and Utah elevation, so we got up and we hiked this -- I'd say a mile-long hike with 50-pound sandbags on our back.

LYNNE ROBERTS: They loved it.

DRU GYLTEN: It was so fun. But I think it showed, like I mentioned before, our strengths, mentally and physically. It's not something that you would choose to hike up a hill with a 50-pound sandbag on your back, but not one time did anyone complain, not one time did anyone question anybody, our coaches, the leaders, the people of the program. I think from our previous years, it showed that everyone has bought into what our coaches are expecting from us and what Utah is as a program, the toughness and to buy into what we're trying to do for this program.

LYNNE ROBERTS: In terms of Kemery Martin, she's the five-star recruit we have coming in -- or she's here now, as a freshman, and she's special. She's going to be a great cornerstone of our program. She's incredibly talented. She's one of those players that just kind of makes the game look easy. She does things where you're like, wow, that was really hard and you make it look like a yawn kind of. She's still a freshman, and there's a learning curve and all of that, but just a tremendous talent that the Pac-12 is going to talk about for a long time.

And yeah, I do think it'll impact attendance. Since I've been at Utah, this is our first local recruit. And I'm proud of that, and I'm proud that we're getting Utah kids, and we're going to continue to recruit the kids that are going to help us win games in the Pac-12 for sure.

Q. Another freshman that will be able to help you

right away, one of the things you've been able to do through your tenure at Utah is get freshmen ready quickly, get them ready to play and not just stem the tide but to give you something. Besides her, who you just mentioned, who else can we expect big things from, and I don't mean superhuman stuff but just contributing?

LYNNE ROBERTS: Well, all three of our freshmen are going to contribute a lot. So we have Kemery Martin mentioned Brynna Maxwell who was the Washington State Player of the Year, one of the best shooters I've ever been around, just incredible competitor, great player. She's going to play. And she will shoot the ball in a way that I don't think we've had yet at Utah. She can keep defenses on us.

And then we have Lola Pendande who's a 6'4" Spanish kid who is legit. And she's a big body, lefty, post, can rebound, can score, plays with passion, big, strong kid. So all three of those guys are going to -- for us to be as good as I hope we can be and think we will be, those three are going to have to contribute quite a bit.

Q. What was the recruiting trail like with Maxwell because everybody in the state of Washington wanted her and the Oregons. You were in a dogfight. How did that play out?

LYNNE ROBERTS: Yeah, it was a dogfight. But you know, I think this is not a novel thought, but it really came down to relationships. My assistant, our assistant, Danny Snelgrove, our recruiting coordinator, she identified Brynna back in -- our first year at Utah. And we started having her call us every other week or whatever when she was in ninth grade. So like we were the first people to send her letters, we were the first people to -- and then she kind of blew up. But we had already kind of needled our way in there and had our hooks in her. But it came down to the wire, and it's competitive in the West Coast, and the Pac-12 is where every great kid wants to play. So all the great programs -- it was really competitive. Same thing with Kemery. But it came down to the relationships we started when they were in ninth grade.

Q. What do you think about where the experts are picking you as far as the Pac-12?

LYNNE ROBERTS: I don't really care. I think it's fair.

Q. Why do you think it's fair?

LYNNE ROBERTS: Because we haven't done much more than that. We finished sixth last year, which was the highest finish ever. But if there's 12 stories in the building, I don't want to stop at six and be happy. You know, we've got to keep climbing. But I don't really think one way or the other. I saw the poll and just kind of was like, oh, cool, hmm. Onward.

Q. How did you put the end of last year behind you, and how are you building upon that going forward?

DRU GYLLEN: Well, I think we can all agree on this, that it definitely wasn't the way we wanted it to end just because it started off so well. But I think it kind of came down to our seniors and the fact that they taught us to accept what happened and learn from it. So definitely that last game against Washington, we were all very emotional. We wanted so much more than what came out. But if anything we learned from it.

I think last year's season is kind of like -- like she said, we don't want to just stop there, we want to do. And we learned from last year, and we've told the upcoming people that we want more from everyone, and I think that's something that we've really been striving for in this off-season is just learning from last year, learning from the last couple months of the season and really springboarding that into this season.

KIANA MOORE: Yeah, just to touch on what Dru said, we had an exceptional year last year. I mean, it's not the way we wanted it to end, and we didn't know when it was going to end, also. And I think our seniors put upon Dru and I that we are capable of leading this year's team, and I think what we really took from last year is when adversity hits us, that we're able to strive and keep going. And I think when adversity -- it's going to hit us this year, and so I think when it hits us this year that we're going to be able to tell the freshmen, like it's okay, we're going to get through it.

And I think that's what Dru and I took a lot from from last year was when we hit adversity, that it'll be okay, we can push through it.