

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

By Quinn Lewis

It's a great opportunity to play basketball in college. I talked with the University of Illinois Womens' Basketball Team to see how they manage being student athletes. Playing a sport in college and trying to get all your work done and win games takes a lot of effort.

Ali Andrews was able to answer many of my questions about how to get everything done. She shared with me about her schedule, "we practice 2-3 hours a day and have one day off each week.". With the girls on this team spending every day but one practicing, I wondered how are they focusing on school. Ali shared, "Time management. After practices you've got to get your homework done, or do it before practice. You just have to find the time to get your stuff done." This seems especially hard when you miss class for away games. To me this seems like a lot to manage, but Ali did say, "We do have an academic advisor that helps us with organizing our school work. It's mostly on our own time to get our work done though." Even though it is hard work Ali shared, "All of the academic and athletic resources that we have are definitely an advantage of being a student-athlete." Her teammate, Petra Holesinska also had thoughts about managing school and athletic life; "The resources we have. There's a lot of assistance you have access to; advisors, tutors, medical professionals; which help us to do better."

So this team is very hard working in school and on the team. It does not sound easy but it seems to be working for the girls on the team.

Now, as one of the teams going into the tournament I wondered if they are working harder and differently to prepare. As Ali Andrews has told me "Just keep knocking down shots, focusing on hitting my outside shots and bringing more of an inside presence." Coach Fahey says "We pretty much stay in our same routine. The difference in preparing for the tournament is that we have played all these teams at least once, which will help us in our preparations for each game."

Coach Fahey also answered a few general questions about the team for me. What is your strategy to coach these girls, do you have a team philosophy? "As far as our strategy goes, we try to be who we are and make sure we know our system, but we may make slight adjustments depending on the personnel of the other team. Our team philosophy is a long answer, generally what we try to do is give 100-percent, take pride in playing for Illinois and work hard while also embodying a 'team first' mentality." And, what are some of the team's strengths and weaknesses? "I think day in and day out, our work ethic is really strong. Our team shares the ball and play like a team. We are a team that's trying to build something special and new, so, in some respects, as a team we're trying to improve in all areas."

For the hometown fans, I asked a few questions to freshmen player, Mackenzie Blazek. She is from Franklin, Indiana, just outside Indianapolis and will be playing in the tournament near her hometown. How are you feeling about coming home to play in the tournament in Indiana? "It's going to be really fun. I played at Bankers Life for the Indiana All-Stars and it was a

really cool experience to play in that arena. I'm hoping a lot of my friends and family will be able to make it so it will be a cool experience."

Was it hard to adjust to college and new team? "It wasn't hard to adjust to the team, they're all great people and really welcoming. But there is a big difference between high school and college, we have some really good resources here that made the transition easier."

Illinois Womens' Basketball Team is working towards winning the tournament. Ali says, about looking forward to the Tournament, "Just trying to get some wins and keep playing. We don't want the season to end, so it's time to get some wins and keep going."

I want to thank the team for sharing with me their thoughts about college sports and the upcoming tournament. I want to wish them success and hope that the hard work they have been putting in will bring them the win for their team.

