

Year of the *Women*

The Indiana University women's basketball team is talented, hardworking, selfless, gritty, fun-loving, and WINNING.

By Greg Siering

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IN A STATE WHERE *basketball*

runs in the blood of fans young and old, Indiana University Hoosiers are a popular topic of lunchtime conversations and friendly debates. Recently, however, much of the focus isn't on the men's team—it's on IU women's basketball. With another successful season underway, more people are taking notice of this energetic and talented team, with game day crowds in Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall steadily on the rise.

After decades of struggling to post winning seasons under previous coaches, the women's team is finding sustained success and an upward trajectory under sixth-year head coach Teri Moren, growing into a program with a national reputation for both smarts and grit. After finishing its fourth 20-win season in a row—with only six others in program history—the Hoosiers started this season ranked in the top 25 teams nationally, working their way up to No. 12 in January.

(l-r) Grace Berger, Jaelynn Penn, Brenna Wise, Head Coach Teri Moren, Aleksa Gulbe, Bendu Yeaney, and Ali Patberg.



Brenna Wise pulls down a rebound. Photo by IU Athletics

Coach Moren is quick to dismiss the importance of those early rankings, saying, “It doesn’t matter how you start. It only matters how you finish.” But she admits that early challenges and strong play are important, particularly against tough opponents. “We’re grateful with the way we’ve started the season in a lot of ways, because we’ve played top teams like South Carolina and Baylor,” she says. “So, we

feel like we’ve seen the best and we’ve competed against the best, and we’ve seen a lot of good things come out of that, which gives us great hope that we have an exciting season ahead of us.”

The team’s growth under Moren is laudable, including two trips to the NCAA Tournament in 2016 and 2019, with first-round wins both times; a WNIT championship in 2018; and the highest overall



Coach Moren gives instructions to point guard Ali Patberg. Photo by IU Athletics

UPCOMING GAMES

FEB. 6 8 p.m. vs. Maryland	FEB. 27 T.B.A. vs. Nebraska
FEB. 9 3 p.m. at Nebraska	MAR. 1 T.B.A. vs. Michigan
FEB. 13 8 p.m. at Illinois	MAR. 4-8 T.B.A. Big Ten Tournament in Indianapolis
FEB. 16 2 p.m. vs. Ohio State	MAR. 27-APR. 5 T.B.A. NCAA Tournament (multiple sites)
FEB. 22 T.B.A. at Minnesota	

Home games are in orange.



Jorie Allen, the pride of Bedford, Indiana, drives past an Illinois defender.

winning percentage (.609) since the program’s first coach, Bea Gorton, in the 1970s.

According to IU Athletic Director Fred Glass, Moren has played a central role in that growth. “She really is cutting new territory in terms of success of women’s basketball, territory we should have been in a long time ago, but she’s leading us there now,” he says.

It started in Seymour, Indiana

Coach Moren’s leadership derives from her early years growing up in nearby Seymour, Indiana. Moren developed a small-town

basketball attitude—one of being underestimated, needing to prove yourself, and knowing you have to work harder than the competition to succeed. “This program is built on our work ethic,” she says. “It’s built on having a chip on our shoulder. It’s built on this notion that we’ve never historically been relevant in women’s basketball. And that’s our approach every day.” Moren and her team draw strength from knowing they haven’t yet arrived, despite their rise in the rankings, and they use that attitude to fuel their hard practices, dedication, and camaraderie.



(left) Point guard Ali Patberg, from Columbus, Indiana, calling out a play on her way down the court; (above) Chanel Wilson, at 5-6 the smallest player on the team, flies above defenders on her way to 2 points.

When Moren joined IU in August 2014, just weeks before the start of the school year, she inherited a team after the unexpected sudden departure of Curt Miller. That team included two star players who would be the core as it grew—Tyra Buss and Amanda Cahill. Combined, they set 10 school records—including Buss’ 2,364 career points and Cahill’s 38.7% 3-point completion. Both rank



Coach Moren outlines a play during a time out.



Three Youngstown State University players try to stop Bendu Yeaney.

among the top five scorers in the history of women's basketball at IU. Together they led their team to the 2018 WNIT championship in front of a record 13,007 fans at Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall.

Two stars depart, two arrive

Some programs may fade after the graduation of star players like Buss and Cahill, but continuity has been a priority in Moren's recruitment strategy, and she was able to bring in transfer players to fill those huge shoes—guard Ali Patberg and forward Brenna Wise. Because of NCAA transfer rules, the two new players had to sit out the 2017–18 season, but they would have gotten minimal playing time anyway behind Buss and Cahill. Still, they benefited from practicing with the star seniors.

Ali Patberg grew up in Columbus, Indiana, where she earned the title of Indiana Miss Basketball in 2015 and gathered an impressive number of records and accolades. After two years at the University of Notre Dame, Patberg decided to transfer to IU for a variety of reasons, including opportunities to excel both on the court and in the classroom at the IU Kelley School of Business. Just as significant was her lifelong identity as

a Hoosiers fan. "I always used to go to the boys' basketball games in Assembly Hall, so I knew what that was like," Patberg says. "I used to dream about playing there when I was little."

As point guard, Patberg is a leader on the team, a role she had been groomed for her whole life, having learned a deep work ethic from her father, Ron Patberg, who was also her AAU coach. She says, "He demanded being a leader, and that meant being vocal, that meant leading by example. First one in the gym, last one out of the gym." That leadership also shows in the energy she brings on the court and the way she runs the offense with a deep understanding of her teammates' abilities and preferences.

"What's really nice as a point guard, too, is knowing your players and knowing where they're comfortable scoring; what they like and what they don't like," Patberg explains. "I know my teammates pretty well and where they want the ball, where they want the pass at." That connection to her teammates led Patberg to record 149 assists last season—close to Buss' junior year 158.

Patberg's fellow 2017 transfer and team leader is Brenna Wise, a 6-0 forward who transferred after her sophomore year at the University of Pittsburgh where she was the team's leading scorer and rebounder. Growing up in Pittsburgh, Wise was a hometown hero who played AAU basketball under John Miller, IU men's basketball coach Archie Miller's father and an icon in western Pennsylvania prep basketball.

Despite her individual success at Pitt, Wise wanted to be in a program that had the potential to help her reach her goals.

"I just realized that in order to achieve the dreams I had set out



(left) Aleksa Gulbe, a freshman from Riga, Latvia, dribbles downcourt; (above, l-r) Brenna Wise and Ali Patberg charge each other up. "They're once-in-a-generation kind of players," says IU Athletic Director Fred Glass. Photo by IU Athletics (opposite page) Patberg outjumps two UCLA defenders and lets a shot go. Photo by IU Athletics





Keyanna Warthen playing the tough Hoosier defense against Illinois.

for myself, I needed to make a move, and those dreams included not only making the NCAA Tournament, but making a deep run in the NCAA Tournament,” she says. “I like to be challenged, and I didn’t want to remain content.” Add to that the lure of an IU education, particularly a double major in the Kelley School of Business, and IU was a fit for her both on and off the court.

Wise possesses the attitude Coach Moren wants to see in her team—hard workers who care less about rankings than they do about putting in the effort needed to win the next game. Wise says, “That is kind of what my identity has been—just that blue-collar type of work. I may not be the most athletic, I may not be the most talented, but my goal is to always step on the court and outwork somebody.”

Wise contributes significantly on offense as a “stretch four,” a power forward who can stretch the defense with her ability to make mid-range jump shots and 3-point shots, which helps to open up the middle so post players Mackenzie Holmes and Aleksa Gulbe can get to the basket. And she echoes Patberg’s view of the unselfish nature of the team. “I think we do a great job of making the extra pass offensively overall, and that’s a very selfless thing for a team,” Wise says. “It’s one thing to get a good shot, but the extra pass gets you a great shot.” She also takes pride in her aggressive defensive game, saying, “I think you can always guarantee a charge out of me.”

Wise views communication as a key to her defensive contributions—an ability to read offenses and help implement the

defensive plans laid out by the coaching staff. Understanding Moren’s emphasis on defense and its role in increasing offensive possessions and team momentum, she says, “The cliché saying is ‘offense sells tickets, but defense wins games.’ Defense wins us our games.”

Athletic Director Glass is impressed with both Patberg and Wise, but not only because of their prowess. “They’re academic stars, they’re athletic stars, and they’re leadership stars,” he says. “It’s awesome to have two of them on the same team, because they’re once-in-a-



Even on her back, Patberg exhorts her teammates on. Photo by IU Athletics

generation kind of players. Those two kids are sort of a two-headed monster on the team, and they both personify Teri’s attributes.”

Depth matters

But the strength of this team rests not just with the current stars. Instead it depends on depth—the other players who round out the team and offer the Hoosiers



Speedy Jaelynn Penn steals the ball and races downcourt ahead of Youngstown State pursuers.

multiple powerful rotations and scoring options. Remarking on Moren’s strong recruiting over the past few years, Glass notes a challenge that most coaches would love to face. “More than five of them can play,” he says, “So Teri has some challenges to balance playing time.”

Outside the arc, Patberg shares guard duties with Jaelynn Penn, a junior from Louisville, Kentucky, who scored her 1,000th career point against Rutgers University on New Year’s Eve. She averaged 13.9 points per game last season and led the team with 57

3-pointers. As a quick player, Penn can be dangerous on transitions, able to change the game’s momentum after a defensive stop, which she demonstrated with a steal and transition layup for those milestone points against Rutgers.

Another junior guard, Bendu Yeane, is part of the team’s defensive strength, and she is often assigned to guard the opponent’s leading scorer. Last season, Yeane contributed a team-leading 51 steals, as well as 109 defensive rebounds and 22 blocked shots. After injuring her Achilles tendon during last spring’s NCAA Tournament, Yeane has gotten off to a slow start this season, but her playing time is gradually increasing.

The Hoosiers have depth and power inside as well. One of the most surprising combinations has come in the pairing of sophomore Aleksa Gulbe from Riga, Latvia, and freshman Mackenzie Holmes, both forwards who rarely share the court but who present a rotation that has proven difficult to defend. Gulbe has the ability to pull back for short- and mid-range jump shots, stretching the defense slightly, while Holmes has proven an effective post player underneath the basket, able to weave her way through defenders for layups.

It is notable that this is a relatively young team, with Wise being the only senior, accompanied by five juniors, two sophomores, and seven freshmen. In addition to Gulbe and Holmes, other young players to watch are sophomore guard Grace Berger, a regular starter whose scoring average has jumped



Freshman MacKenzie Holmes, 6-3, has shown herself to be a prolific scorer and rebounder off the bench. Photo by IU Athletics

considerably this season, and freshman Jorie Allen of Bedford, the 2019 Indiana Miss Basketball, who has seen limited playing time, but has injected energy that helped the Hoosiers in victories against Michigan State University and Rutgers. The Hoosiers have a strong group of young players to develop during conference and post-season play, with even greater potential going forward. "I want Indiana to be respected and always rising," Wise says of her wishes for this young team now on an upward trajectory.

It's about more than basketball

While the wins and the rankings keep the crowds coming and fans' expectations high, everyone involved with the team knows this is all about more than basketball. Glass is the first to point out that Coach Moren embodies the values of IU Athletics, saying, "She's trying to develop these kids the best they can be developed athletically, academically, and personally." She and the players understand the importance of academic success, evident in the fact that seven players on the 2018-19 team



Grace Berger goes up for a layup. A sophomore from Louisville, Kentucky, she has been filling the stat sheet as a top scorer while adding rebounds and assists.

earned Academic All-Big Ten honors, the most in a single season in program history. Beyond academics, the players understand the importance playing for IU has on their character development, the importance of their camaraderie, and the importance of their fans. This is touchingly obvious in the ritual that follows every home game, win or lose. The players line up arm-in-arm near the south basket to sing the IU alma mater, then welcome fans to come down to the court for autographs, selfies, and to meet their favorite players.

Patberg admits that spending time on the court after a loss can be difficult, but she also realizes that might be the best time to do it. "It does put it in perspective, when you have a bad game or you lose, and a little girl comes up and gives you a picture she drew for you, and you realize it's more than just a

game we're playing," she says. "It makes you want to go out there and play harder and perform well for them, because it brings them joy."

Fans come to these games for many reasons, and while these personal connections and the fun atmosphere do bring younger fans and their families back, Glass says that this team provides exactly what Indiana fans want. "It's a great game, and Indiana people have a great appreciation for basketball." He notes that the women's game is played below the rim, relying on strategy, ball movement, teamwork, and careful play development. Add to that great athleticism and skill, he says, and the team is a perfect fit for Hoosier fans.

Reflecting on why she thinks Indiana fans appreciate their games, Patberg returns to what she finds most special. "We are a once-in-a-lifetime team because of our chemistry, our love for one another, and our unselfishness," she says. "I think that's the most beautiful basketball. And I think we are going to do special things because of it." ✖



An IU 3-pointer goes in and the bench shows its appreciation.



At the conclusion of every home game, win or lose, the entire team lines up arm-in-arm to sing the IU alma mater.