

IWUhoops.com 2018-19 Season Preview

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Senior PG Brady Rose averaged 21.4 points, 2.7 rebounds, and 3.1 assists last year, and made 71 3-pointers

Season Preview Q&A with Illinois Wesleyan Head Coach Ron Rose

BQ: This is our 13th try at this...are you ready?

RR: This is always my hardest-hitting interview of the year, Q. I was up all night preparing. I am ready.

BQ: "Let's start with last year. Your team won 19 games, and won the school's 30th CCIW men's basketball championship. What are your thoughts looking back on last season?"

RR: "In so many ways I was really pleased with last year's season. I thought it was a hard-working team that played at a really high level in competing for that CCIW championship. But in the end you have a sour taste in your mouth because of how it finished – we just didn't finish well. There was more left in our tank. We were in position to win the conference outright and be seeded very high in the NCAA

tournament...and we didn't do it. Because of how we finished, we ended up with a really tough first round (NCAA tournament) matchup and lost a close game that could have gone either way. So everyone was unsettled with how it finished. But we were thrilled to win a CCIW title."

BQ: "Right after the season ended, of course, you and your staff hit the final stages of the recruiting process hard. How do you feel about the new guys your brought in?"

RR: "We couldn't be more excited about the freshman class. Recruiting is the life blood of any program. This freshman class has a ton of potential and is filled with Illinois Wesleyan-type people and players. So far, Peter Lambesis and Matt Leritz have stood out. But it is a deep and talented class."

BQ: "You've been practicing for a few weeks now. How has the pre-season been?"

RR: "One thing I've learned in coaching is that you have to fight for your program's culture every year. You have to establish the right environment to be successful, and that is something this team has embraced. We have four seniors that have really taken ownership, and then just a roster filled with really hard workers and motivated players and high-character young men. You walk into the weight room and they are encouraging each other and supporting each other; they walk into practice ready to go; basketball is very important to these guys. The culture we have established excites me."

BQ: "You return a lot of talent from last season. Can you talk about some of those players?"

RR: "We have four starters returning. To have three senior guards (Brady Rose, Colin Bonnett, Jason Gregoire) is a luxury that doesn't happen too often in college basketball. We have three big, strong guards. Then we have Alex O'Neill coming back with a year as a starter under his belt. They way Alex finished last season really has us excited for what's to come this year. So you start with these four guys and you immediately know you have a chance to have a really good season. You look at Danny Baker – you know what you are getting with Bake, he is all about the team and will do whatever you ask him to do and play hard. So you have those four seniors – if you are an underclassmen, I don't know how you don't fall in line and play hard. The four seniors really set a tone on this team in terms of how hard they work and how much time they spend in the gym. It's a luxury that, as a coach, you don't get every year. Then you look at all the young players that gained experience last year – guys like Grant Wolfe and Doug Wallen. It's just very exciting to return this much talent."

BQ: "Just a couple days ago , a few days before your opening game, Miles Curry, who you expected to start, left the team. What can you tell us about that?"

RR: "I'm disappointed that Miles is not with us anymore. He came in this week and just said his heart is not in it anymore. I was very surprised. The reality, though, is that to be a college student-athlete requires a tremendous commitment. If your heart is not in it, then you are better off, and the team is better off, if you step away. I think so highly of Miles as a person and wish him the best during the rest of his college career and beyond."

BQ: "What guys who weren't on the roster last year, or maybe not mainstays in the rotation, should Titan fans keep an eye on this year?"

RR: "Doug Wallen was on the periphery last year and I kind of made a mistake in not giving him more of an opportunity. He is poised to have a breakout year. He is a big wing and high energy guy. People are really going to enjoy the effort and the way Doug plays. Charlie Bair played JV last year and was in the weight room non-stop trying to build up his body. It is amazing in one year the work Charlie has done to get himself ready physically. Charlie's motor and effort were never in question – he just wasn't physically quite ready. But he is ready now. Bernie Coderre is another. He is a young man who is the ultimate worker and team player – he brings it every day in practice and just makes the team better. Brice Robinson has really shown a lot of improvement this year. His approach to the game and understanding has really put him in the conversation. Two freshman have stood out so far and are in the mix for time – Peter Lambesis and Matt Leritz. Pete's athletic ability and feel for the game are beyond that of most freshmen. And then Matt has shown he has a college-ready body and is just a physical kid. Most freshmen in college are not ready for the physical play aspect and that is just not an issue with Matt. He is a seeker of contact and does not back down."

BQ: "Your non-conference schedule is always tough. This year it seems borderline ridiculous. Talk about how you expect those games to help you get better."

RR: "Our goal is always to play the best competition we can. We always want to have one of the elite strength of schedules in the country. A lot of our guys come to Illinois Wesleyan because they want to play the best. Strong non-conference competition positions you to be ready for a CCIW championship run, and also prepares you on the national scale. This is as challenging of a non-conference schedule as we have had in my time here. We are playing some elite programs. When you have a team like ours this year, they want to be challenged. We have certainly delivered that this year."

BQ: "The CCIW is a top two league in Division III and is always strong. How do you assess the conference this year?"

RR: "The league is always really tough but there are some years when you have a large number of returning players. This is one of those years. A lot of teams have key players coming back. We have four starters returning, so does Augustana. Wheaton has five. Then I think there are some programs that played young guys last year that have a lot coming back and will take that next step. There are never nights off in the CCIW, but this year I think you'll see a case where teams that end up in the bottom half of the standings will frequently beat top half teams."

BQ: "You've already played two exhibitions, both against D1 teams – Illinois-Chicago and Illinois. What did you take from those games?"

RR: "There was a lot of excitement about these games that permeated the program throughout the off-season. It certainly was a motivator for our guys in the summer and pre-season to get themselves ready, knowing we had to play two D1 games two weeks after practice started. We didn't have a lot of time to prepare for those games so we knew we had to come in physically ready to get after it. In those first two weeks of practice we seemed extra locked in because we knew what was coming. In addition, just the opportunity to give our players that level of experience against Division I opponents...our guys

really enjoyed that. For our fans it was really neat too. We had a great crowd at UIC; at Illinois the ticket manager said they were blown away by our fan base and how many people we had in Champaign. So it provides an exciting start to the season that we hope to carry into the regular season.”

BQ: “What do you feel the identity of this team is or will be?”

RR: “This group is going to lace ‘em up and play every night. They are going to compete for each other. We are a skilled team, but there is a level of toughness in these guys I really like. Our identity will evolve and develop as the season goes on, but for now I will just say ‘toughness.’”

BQ: “What are the keys to the season?”

RR: “Our schedule is so demanding that we’ve got to be ready to play every night. In terms of ability level, the physical attributes of this team, and the championship DNA of its character, we have a chance to have a special season. That being said, the teams we are playing are saying the same thing. So it’s just a matter of being ready to play and getting the job done. We have a chance to be really good.”

BQ: “OK, we are ready to move into the speed round. The clocks starts now. First question, who would win an MMA-style match in the Octagon between Coach G and Bosko?”

RR: “[30 seconds of intense laughter] I was not expecting this one. I am not sure who would win but I would buy a ticket!”

BQ: “Can you name any posters from the D3hoops.com chat board?”

RR: “I can. Admittedly I have tried to not go out there, but there is valuable insight there at times. And then sometimes there is some not-so-valuable insight. I can name a few, yes. I’ll go Titan Q and Greg Sager.”

BQ: “Better handles – Ron Rose or Brady Rose?”

RR: “Handles that are actually productive - Brady Rose. Show handles - Ron Rose.”

BQ: “Which player on the current roster is most likely to be famous someday?”

RR: “I’m going with Brice Robinson. That smile is irresistible. Somehow it will make him famous, mark my words.”

BQ: “What is something Dennie Bridges taught you that you think about regularly?”

RR: “Get off the bus with the best players.”

BQ: "Which teammate from your 1987-88 team would help the 2018-19 Titans the most?"

RR: "Well it's real hard not to go with 7-foot Bill Braksick. He would be a difference maker in any generation in Division III."

BQ: "Which current CCIW player is the hardest to prepare for?"

RR: "There are several that are hard to prepare for, but the hardest is Aston Francis (Wheaton). His ability to shoot it, and where he shoots from, just distorts the game."

BQ: "What is most hostile road environment you played in as a Titan?"

RR: "As a player by far it was my last game, at Ohio Wesleyan my senior year ('87-88). My ears are still ringing it was so loud in there."

BQ: "Final question of the speed round. How worried were you when 5-11/175 Grant Wolfe got into a scrap with the Illini's 6-9/235 Giorgi Bezhnashvili?"

RR: "I would never worry about Grant, he is very scrappy. It doesn't matter how big the other guy is, no worries here."

Depth Chart

(listed in order of IWUhoops.com projection of depth chart position; player comments by Ron Rose)

PG (1):

- [Brady Rose, 6-3/185 Sr.](#) – "Thankful for the opportunity to coach him during his college career...has worked hard and added pieces to his game every year...big strong combo guard that can score at an elite level."
- [Grant Wolfe, 5-11/175 So.](#) – "Fiery, scrappy point guard...quick with the basketball...can create for others and can get into the paint."
- [Bernie Coderre, 6-4/200 Jr.](#) – "Incredible teammate, hard worker, elite defender...young man who just makes your team better."
- [Eric Higgs, 6-0/155 So.](#) – "Quick combo guard...learning the point guard spot...can really, really score."

SG (2):

- [Colin Bonnett, 6-4/190 Sr.](#) – "Four-year starter...fierce competitor...big, strong wing that can do a lot of different things on the floor...has shot the ball really well in his career...one of the very few two-year captains we've ever had."
- [Peter Lambesis, 6-4/190 Fr.](#) – "Really athletic combo guard...lock down perimeter defender...has great feel for the game...is going to be a very good player for us."
- [Colin Cheaney, 6-4/195 So.](#) – "Smooth stroke...just a great shot...understated athlete...his body and aggressiveness continue to improve...excited about his continued development."

- [Cory Noe, 6-2/185 Fr.](#) – “Really skilled combo guard...can play the 1 or the 2 very well...uber competitive...has a bright future in our program.”
- [Ben Grunder, 6-2/185 Fr.](#) – “Hard worker...terrific kid...good defender...glad he is part of the program.”

G/F (3):

- [Jason Gregoire, 6-4/205 Sr.](#) – “A glue guy...makes winning hustle plays...pure 3-point shooter when his feet are set...terrific offensive rebounder...when he is on the floor the team is better.”
- [Doug Wallen, 6-5/210 So.](#) – “Big, strong, athletic wing...natural scoring ability...plays with an infectious enthusiasm.”
- [Max Muller, 6-6/200 So.](#) – “Highly intelligent player...can really the shoot the ball...plays ridiculously hard...he is coming on strong.”
- [Gavin Markgraff, 6-4/195 Fr.](#) – “A knock-down shooter...gifted communicator...I have never had a freshman who communicates better on the court than he does...picks stuff up really quickly.”
- [Matt Giannakopoulos, 6-5/185 So.](#) – “Big, strong guard...knock-down shooter...understated ball-handling skills...can score in a lot of ways.”

F (4):

- [Charlie Bair, 6-7/205 So.](#) – “High motor, high effort player...does all the little things to help the team win...has gotten stronger through dedication in the weight room...has the ability to score both around the basket and from the perimeter when his feet are set.”
- [Danny Baker, 6-6/220 Sr.](#) – “True program guy...great teammate...hard worker...embodies what Titan basketball is all about...will do whatever the coach asks...terrific defender...good rebounder...the kind of kid you win with.”
- [Jack Martin, 6-4/180 So.](#) – “Crazy athletic...plays really hard...terrific defender...thrives in the open court.”

F/C (5):

- [Alex O’Neill, 6-9/245 Jr.](#) – “Gifted, unique athlete at our level...has made huge strides in the last year...can step out and shoot the ball...very good scorer in the low post...another player who is all about the team...poised to have a big year.”
- [Matt Leritz, 6-6/220 Fr.](#) – “Physical post player...scrappy, hard-nosed post...college-ready body...great low post footwork...can step out and shoot it.”
- [Brice Robinson, 6-7/205 Jr.](#) – “Really pleased with the progress he has made in the last year...skilled post that can play the 4 or 5...can shoot from the perimeter...a long-armed athlete...natural rebounding instincts...has gotten himself very much in the conversation now.”

IWUhoops.com Projected Varsity Rotation

Position	Starter	Bench (In)	Bench (Close/Pushing)
PG	Brady Rose, 6-3 Sr.	Grant Wolfe, 5-11 So.	
SG	Colin Bonnett, 6-4 Sr.	Bernie Coderre, 6-4 Jr	Peter Lambesis, 6-4 Fr.
G/F	Jason Gregoire, 6-4 Sr.	Doug Wallen, 6-5 So.	
F	Charlie Bair, 6-7 Sr.	Danny Baker, 6-6 Sr.	
F/C	Alex O’Neill, 6-9 Sr.	Matt Leritz, 6-6 Fr.	Brice Robinson, 6-7 Jr.

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Final Thoughts

Thanks to Ron Rose for the time, as always.

This is a very talented IWU team that has a chance to do special things this year. Should be another fun season of IWU basketball.

Best of luck to Ron Rose and his team, and go Titans!



The 2018-19 Titans open Sunday, November 11, at home, vs the University of Chicago