

Big Ten Volleyball Media Days

Monday, August 5, 2024

Chicago, Illinois, USA

Maryland Terrapins

Coach Adam Hughes

Zoe Huang

Samantha Schnitta

Press Conference



ADAM HUGHES: Thrilled to be here. Again, it's my third year doing this, and every year just reminds me how special this is. Happy we have these two here representing us for a variety of reasons. They've been great leaders for our program, and with this new chapter beginning Big Ten play, just excited to get going in literally two days, three days. It's coming fast. Happy to be here.

Q. Adam, this is one of the oldest teams I've seen. How do you use that to your advantage?

ADAM HUGHES: I think we've got eight seniors coming back this year. It's one of those things where we're wrapping up the COVID generation.

I think it's huge for us just because we have a lot of vets, a lot of experience. It's one of the things we're banking on. The last couple years we've had some people have good years individually but now we are hoping we can put it all together and kind of align that.

Anastasia Russ is a great example. Two years ago she was all-conference. We are hoping that Schnitta can have a really good breakout year for us. If we can put it all together, we feel like we've got a lot of experience.

We're also changing our non-conference scheduling a little bit, trying to attack the RPI as best we possibly can, and to do that our schedule is kind of all over the place. We're playing some mid-week matchups.

It is a very, very old group, and it was a great spring for us. Realistically it was nice to have almost 16 bodies be able to practice all semester, so we're excited about the beginning of the preseason.

Q. Samantha, you're one of those people coming back. What is the strength of having so many people with experience in fifth, sixth years? How do you get

that to translate to success on the court?

SAMANTHA SCHNITTA: I think it's able to transition in that way because nothing is new. Nothing is a surprise. We've been in this conference. We've been here. We do have newcomers. We have freshmen. But having so many seniors and two-be graduates allows us to get the tone for the newbies. Like this is what we're going to do; this why we do it; this is how we do it.

Q. You've had a very consistent Big Ten record over the last couple years. Could you talk a little bit about the intangibles that a casual fan might not notice over the last three years and what you're going to do to take the next step forward?

ADAM HUGHES: Yeah, we feel like we've built stability. That's one of the things. We didn't want to be just a flash in the pan. I think this kind of started in '21 when we were able to beat Wisconsin before they won a National Championship, and it was really crucial for us to follow it up with another good season.

But what I love, the fact is that we've had three successful seasons and it's not enough. I think people really want us to make the tournament. I think we've talked about it a lot. We spent a whole spring talking about these are the habits we need and we really wanted our seniors to come back, see if they could take one last shot see if we can get there.

Yeah, for us we've had significant wins. Picked up a good win against Wisconsin a number of years ago. Beat Minnesota at home last year. Been able to beat Ohio State and Purdue.

Conference is getting bigger, obviously getting better, so we know we are a bigger challenge in front of us. But it's why we all chose to be here. It's the Big Ten.

Q. What do you think is an advantage that your team has that no other team has?

ADAM HUGHES: I think the seniors are for sure that. Just a lot of experience being in situations, both good and bad. You learn a lot of lessons, and that's one of the challenges



when you have a younger crew, is these guys know how we've changed our offense and why we've changed our offense over the last few years, what are the shortcomings and why we're making those transitions versus some of the newcomers come in really don't know exactly what the why is behind those things.

So we're banking pretty hard on experience, and I think that's going to serve us well in the long run.

Q. What is your greatest accomplishment as an athlete?

SAMANTHA SCHNITTA: That was a good question.

ZOE HUANG: Being a 5'3" setter, it's really hard for me to play at a super high competitive level. To be honest, being in the Big Ten, being able to compete at this level and see some of the best players in the country is probably my biggest achievement.

SAMANTHA SCHNITTA: Probably along those same lines. When I was getting recruited in high school I was seen as undersized and labeled as maybe not able to compete in the Big Ten. And while I didn't start in the Big Ten, but being able to come to the Big Ten and compete and work against these other players, it's super cool and a big accomplishment for me.

Q. Samantha and Zoe, you have such a senior-led team and you've talked about that. How do you integrate your young players as much as possible knowing one injury away, one set away from needing them to step up into a role that maybe they're not getting the reps in other programs that they would be getting?

SAMANTHA SCHNITTA: I think our gym does a very good job of being able to get reps equally no matter what. Like when we play sixes everybody gets to play a little bit different position and everybody gets tried in different positions.

And so with that, we all have the ability to step in for everybody. I think something that's really unique about us is everybody has the knowledge and the skill level to step into somebody else's role when needed.

I think our support from our older and upperclassmen allows those freshmen to feel confident stepping into those roles, so if they have questions they're not scared to ask us.

ADAM HUGHES: I would also say last year we had a really unique example of someone -- when we didn't have

a lot of depth when I first got started, a lot of freshman had to play right away.

There is a little lack of pressure to that sometimes. There's no one gunning for you. You're just put in that role and it's, hey, trial by fire; figure it out.

But you don't learn some of the lessons of what it feels like to battle to win that spot, so we've had some players who have had to deal with that in the last year as we've gotten more depth, and I think they've become stronger because of that.

I think the nice thing with these guys being good leaders is they're teaching the youngsters what that's like, and when you get your opportunities, make the most of them. When your time is called, you'll earn it, and we trust that you'll make the most of that.

Q. When you were younger was your first sport volleyball?

SAMANTHA SCHNITTA: I started playing volleyball when I was probably 10, but first I played soccer. So I played soccer, volleyball, and basketball, so everything a different season. And then in high school I threw the javelin. Really did a lot of different things.

ZOE HUANG: For me, I didn't do any other sports. It was just volleyball. Started in fourth grade, so pretty young. I fell in love with it pretty hard.

ADAM HUGHES: The Orioles will be made at me, but I thought I was going to play for the Yankees. I thought I was going to be Don Mattingly.

Q. I have a younger sister who plays volleyball. She's a junior in high school. What advice would you give her to be prepared to play on that higher level? She wants to get in the Big Ten, get in the higher level of volleyball.

ZOE HUANG: It's hard. I think it's probably harder than some people anticipate. There's a lot of challenge. You really have to grind. You have to be on top of your schoolwork. Time management is really important, especially if you're in high school and you want to get to a high academic school. It's important you're on top of it and it puts you above kind of other athletes that might not focus on their academics like that.

I also think you have to work. A lot of reps, a lot of time in the gym. It's a grind.

SAMANTHA SCHNITTA: I was going to say reps, as many

reps as you can get in the weight room. Get used to moving a bar around Olympic lifts. That helps you grow on the court super fast.

ADAM HUGHES: And if she's 6'9" and has a massive wingspan, it also helps.

Q. When other teams will come play you, they'll oftentimes spend a day in D.C. Do you guys have anything planned, especially with the addition of the West Coast schools?

ADAM HUGHES: They should all do a full day tour outside in the sun, outside all day walking around. There's been a history of teams that have done that and then lost to us. We would ask all of them to come in here and do a tour of D.C.

Q. If you didn't go to Maryland, where would you go?

ZOE HUANG: I'm from Virginia, so I would probably say UVA or Tech.

SAMANTHA SCHNITTA: If I didn't play athletics, probably KU. I'm from Kansas, so stay home. But other than that, I wouldn't change where I'm at.

ADAM HUGHES: I went to Penn State, so stayed in the Big Ten family.

Q. How do you handle pressure during a competition?

SAMANTHA SCHNITTA: I lean on my teammates. I think that's what we have is a really good culture is being able to lean on each other, whether somebody needs the help or doesn't need the help.

Being able to look to the person to your left and to your right and really lean and believe in them.

ZOE HUANG: Yeah, I would agree. Definitely talking to my teammates. But I think in practice, we practice a lot of little competitions where there's pressure. Like you don't get the point, you go back to zero. Or like if you make an error, like you're minus points. I think we work a lot at least in games on dealing with pressure and trying overcome challenges of feeling like you have to be perfect for a certain point.

ADAM HUGHES: Yeah, I'd just say change your mindset towards pressure is a privilege. You realize you want to be in these situations, and it turns into kind of a joy.

Q. How does your job as a coach change when you have a team that's this experienced? You're not

coaching little things, where to go, what to do. Specifically what are you able to work on when you have an experienced team?

ADAM HUGHES: I think every year I've kind of tried to figure out what the vibe of the group is and see what I need to be to support that.

Some years it has to be a little bit more supportive; some years they a little bit more drive, a little bit more determination.

This year it's a little bit more clear. I think they're an eclectic group. We got a lot of personalities from different walks of life, and I think we thrive in that kind of scenario.

One of our things we talked about in our culture is be you, align with us. We got people from all over the country. We now have a student-athlete coming from Turkey this year.

I think that's one of the things that actually makes us a big strength. We have some transfers, too, who have brought some of their experiences, so for me it's trying to find this common ground between all of that. I think it's easier when you have a lot more personalities.

Q. What would you say is your biggest rivalry?

SAMANTHA SCHNITTA: We always say Penn State just because of Hughes and his background there.

ADAM HUGHES: I want to beat them so bad. I'm really good friends with Katie. I went there. Russ Rose is a dear mentor and like a second father to me. I always joke in his last year before he retired, I took him to five. I was up 2-0 and choked that one away and he ended up winning in five.

He told me he needed that win more than I needed it. I disagree with him. I needed that win badly. He retired afterwards. I would like beat Penn State. That would be good.

Q. When you have the young high schoolers looking to make their college decision, it's not as often where you have players maybe stay locally or play locally. Both of you not necessarily in that situation. But what drew you not only to Maryland but to stay there?

ZOE HUANG: Personally I'm kind of local. I'm probably about an hour away from College Park. I grew up driving to Maryland games; I watched a lot of basketball.

But I think for me, I really love being close to my family, and I really discovered myself and who I am and who I

want to be. I've developed a lot as a person, and I think Maryland and the staff around Maryland and the different opportunities that they offer have really allowed me to grow and find my own, which is why I've stayed.

SAMANTHA SCHNITTA: I'd say looking for another school, another program halfway through my collegiate career, I was really looking for a connection, a connection with our head coach, our assistant coach. Being able to walk in and have an uncomfortable comfortable conversation.

Those conversations with the head coach are uncomfortable. That's what it is. But to know that Hughes really took care of me and cared for me and who I was and was able to open up to his family from the start from my visit, that was so special to me that I wouldn't ever want to change it.

ADAM HUGHES: For me it's people matter. My kids are around the program a lot. Took them on foreign tour last year. I want them to see the strengths of the young women and role models.

Honestly college athletics is changing a lot, and for us as coaches I think we have to readjust and make sure we keep finding our purpose. I think Zoe nailed it. Her story is why she's here in a lot of ways. She was someone who was trying to find her way a little bit, and now she speaks for our entire athletic department as our SAC president.

I think she represents our culture and exactly why we want her to be here, to showcase it.

Q. Outside of volleyball, do you have any other skills? And Coach, what is something you will do to make sure your team comes out on top?

ZOE HUANG: Outside of volleyball I think I'm a pretty skilled cook. That might be self-declared, but...

SAMANTHA SCHNITTA: Probably also enjoy cooking, but I like to paint. Painting is one of my big things, an outlet I've always looked to from high school. Whether it's good or not, something I like to do.

ADAM HUGHES: I would say to answer your question how do we come out on top, I think it's really important to be grounded and have perspective. It allows you to be competitive. To realize, yes, this matters, but in the grand scheme of things it's what you're becoming as a result of this.

I want them to embrace the competition. I think this spring we've done a really good job of that. But for us it's

probably just being grounded and having good perspective.

Q. Thoughts on no double touch and the two liberos?

ADAM HUGHES: Marsha is here, too, so I've got to be careful how I say this. I do not care about the double at all. I honestly am a stats guy. I see it called once a match per team. It's something that we don't even really look at.

If anything, I think it'll just clean the game up a little bit, a little bit faster. I think the biggest thing will be calming the crowds down when they're yelling for it. It's like, move on. It's already been a thing at the club level.

The two libero thing, it doesn't drive me in any direction realistically. I don't know if we would really use it that often into continuity at positions and trying to build some confidence in that.

I'd probably deflect on that and say, neutral.

Was that a good answer, Marsha?

Q. Toughest venue to play away and your favorite venue to play away?

SAMANTHA SCHNITTA: I think toughest is Nebraska. When they get on that run, then the whole environment and the whole gym just takes off and they just take off with them. So that's always hard to come back and stop their run and then try to get your own run. That quiets their crowd, but as soon as they get the ball back it's really fast.

Probably my favorite is Purdue. The way their student section just gets involved with you guys and is able to cheer with you and you're able to have fun with them, and I also believe that their environment is so much like our own that we can use that energy for ourselves.

ZOE HUANG: I think one of my favorites is Wisconsin. I think last time I had some friends come out to Wisconsin, so I got to meet them kind of outside around the bleachers and I got to walk around and they were taking pictures with the badger, and I was like, should I get in. It was really kind of fun.

The crowd behind us was really loud and kind of in your face, and I thought, it's always fun to play when a team is like that.

The hardest, I think Minnesota is also pretty hard. It's a huge gym, and they feel really far away, and it feels almost kind of quiet but then they get really loud, and I'm like, oh, my gosh and it's a really big gym, so I like it.

ADAM HUGHES: I would say it's hard for me to say at Penn State. As an alum, I don't want to be the center of attention in anything. It's hard to get out of that because I spent so much time in that place.

I'm most excited to play at Oregon of the three new schools I've never played there. I've played at the other three.

My favorite is probably Madison. I'm a runner, so it's a great place to go for a run.

Q. Who would you say is your best player?

ADAM HUGHES: I've got three daughters and I've learned you can't have a best daughter. You have a daughter for this, a daughter for that, a daughter for this.

Q. Who would you say is a player that's unstoppable against the other team?

ADAM HUGHES: Probably looking at Schnitta to have a breakout season for us. She came in last year and I think was trying to find her way just in what the conference looks like and I think you see for us it's like watching a trajectory of where you're going.

In the second half of the Big Ten I thought she was playing the best as any opposite in the conference, and I think she's built that confidence over just a number of matches and Big Ten play. We're hoping that she can lead us there this season.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports