

Big Ten Volleyball Media Days

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USC Trojans

Coach Brad Keller

Ally Batenhorst

Mia Tuaniga

Press Conference



about the Big Ten and how has the move to LA gone?

ALLY BATENHORST: It's been great. The girls are super welcoming and staff has been welcoming. The transition has been smooth. That's been amazing.

I would say Big Ten is obviously the most competitive conference for volleyball. And I think I've experienced a lot of big matches in front of big crowds and it's just high-level volleyball and it's a different style of play than it is on the West Coast. I'm still learning West Coast style of volleyball, which is so fun.

I think just to expect big games. Every match is going to be super hard. And I think we're really, really excited to kind of come to the Big Ten and a lot of people won't know what to expect from our team. I think that's something we're excited about because we're playing a different style. And we have a really good group this year and we're going to come out with a bang.

Q. Brad, you said this is overwhelming and thinking about the Big Ten. What's overwhelming about this and thinking about the Big Ten going forward?

BRAD KELLER: You guys. I hate talking in front of people, which is weird because I'm a coach. It's a weird thing. No, I think it's overwhelming in a positive way, meaning the level of professionalism and how much you all care about this sport.

This is a passion of ours. I'm a coach. This is my life. So to see it being brought up this way or presented this way or cared about this way means the world. And I can't put into words just yet -- I need to process that a little bit more. But I think that's what I was trying to get at when I said that.

By the way, we didn't really answer your question. So I'm going to go ahead and do that.

We're going to play a lot faster and more creative and throw the ball around. We're going to do a lot of things that you see the national teams doing because I believe that we need to play a style of volleyball that international -- is what it's presenting.

BRAD KELLER: We are very, very grateful to be here, and this has been a little overwhelming in a positive way. So I want to say thank you to the Big Ten and for just the hospitality here, how you guys have treated us. This movement over has been seamless and we're just honestly excited to be here, and we'll try to do our best to answer questions. But there's going to be a lot of unknowns for us as you probably are aware, but we will do our best. So away we go.

Q. Mia, what brand of volleyball is the Big Ten getting with USC? What can Big Ten teams expect from USC and from the other three schools joining?

MIA TUANIGA: I think what a lot of the new schools that are coming in, we're just going to bring some West Coast swag. That's what I'm excited about. I don't know a whole lot about Big Ten, but I'm excited to come in and be ourselves and bring that West Coast.

Q. Mia, what was it like to be asked to speak to all the players, coaches and Big Ten officials? And what was your message to the players in the league and coaches?

MIA TUANIGA: It was such a huge blessing. I want to give all the glory to God for, my story isn't just mine it's His. And when I'm playing people ask me how do I do this. Truly when I'm on the court I pray He just shines through me.

My message last night was just sharing my story and where I'm coming from. And I think everyone was showing just great hospitality last night. I want to thank all of you guys for being so kind to us. And it's truly a blessing to be here. So thank you.

Q. Ally, welcome back to the Big Ten. You've been gone months. What have you told the teammates



I think we're seeing that right now through the Olympics. So if you want to be the very best, you kind of have to mimic or copy or train in that sort of style, setting, what have you.

That's kind of what we're going to be doing. I'm sure we're not the only team doing that, but that's what we're going to be bringing.

Q. I wanted to ask, since SC is such a brand name and really, really prominent in especially women's volleyball, women's beach, how are you going to take that to continue to grow women's indoor volleyball?

MIA TUANIGA: In general. Well, I think this past year USC has really grown a lot. Women's basketball, like you mentioned. JuJu Watkins is doing things that nobody else is doing. Walking the same halls as the men's basketball team or women's basketball team and there are so many athletes really raising the standard. And we're constantly trying to strive for greatness. I think that's the thing, when we talk about USC branding, that's standard.

ALLY BATENHORST: When you think of USC you just think of greatness. There's so much respect towards the school. And internationally everyone knows what USC is about. I think that's something that's really special and unique.

I also think, like I said earlier, there's a lot of Olympians, most Olympians are from USC. That says a lot about our program, and I'm just super grateful to be a part of it.

Q. What is one thing you need to improve in the gym and how will you do it?

ALLY BATENHORST: I think we're always improving, I think, just every part of our game. And I think at USC we said West Coast style of volleyball. There's a lot of room for creativity and just freedom to try new things. I think the staff does a really great job of allowing us that space to kind of grow and work through things. And that's something I really appreciate.

I think, obviously it's still a new program for me and I think I'm still trying to get used to everything and kind of getting to know the girls. We're a really cohesive group. So it's going to be exciting.

MIA TUANIGA: It's not only improving but how much can we learn from each other, how much can we learn from our coaches. Just really amping up our IQ and how much can we learn in one day. Keep striving for that.

Q. Brad, Ally has only been with you a short time officially. Why did you choose to ask her to represent you this week?

BRAD KELLER: Have you met her? Part of what I do is I'm big on personalities and I'm big on recruiting big dreamers. I said this in the other interview was one of my favorite quotes is, "Imagination is more powerful than knowledge. Knowledge is limited."

And why that means something to me is I want people that are willing to go for it all and have a big appetite. They dream. They are not afraid. They are go-getters.

And you saw that last night in Mia's speech. If you were there for last night's speech, you know that Mia -- she is her; I keep saying she is her, but she is not afraid. She's going to go for it all. Ally is the same way.

And Ally's been there and done that. She's been to two national championships. She's gone through the wars to get to the highest level. She walks into a room and you guys immediately notice her. She doesn't have to say anything. She's magnetic. So she draws people to her.

So, of course, I'm going to have those types of people up here talking to all of you because I want to you see, get a good visual of what my program is, and this is exactly the representation I want. So it was a really easy choice for me when it comes to having her.

Listen, she's not the only -- I have 18 young women that are fantastic, that could do a great job here. I just felt it was these two young ladies' turn. It was our first time here. I think we have to hit it off with a bang. I think we have to look at you and say this is exactly who we are.

Q. How has playing volleyball contributed to your personal development?

ALLY BATENHORST: That's a loaded question.

MIA TUANIGA: That's a good question.

ALLY BATENHORST: Volleyball has contributed to every part of my life. I think I've met most of, almost all of my friends through volleyball. My family has just grown so much. My whole family plays volleyball.

I think there's a lot of life lessons that come out of sports in general and just overcoming adversity and there's different challenges thrown your way and playing under pressure. Going into the workforce you're going to be under pressure and you'll be surrounded different personalities. And you have you to learn and understand people around you and

just grow as a person. And just I think overall I think volleyball has contributed so much to my life.

MIA TUANIGA: I mean, I think she worded it perfectly. I mentioned it a little bit last night, too. God showed His faithfulness to my family through this sport. I've received so many blessings being able to grow up playing volleyball. I'm so just blessed to be here with you guys and really share that personal development that you talk about.

Q. When you think over the last two years in recruiting and transfer recruiting, how has the fact that you're going to be in the Big Ten, how has that come up in those conversations and what that's going to mean for recruits and transfer recruits?

BRAD KELLER: Is that, the question more has it helped us a little bit?

Q. What's the impact?

BRAD KELLER: It's just, again, the physicality of the Big Ten, you have to recruit towards that. So it's changed my way of how I'm recruiting a little bit or who I'm going after. I've always been someone who has been going after a lot of maybe some smaller players that are really quick twitch fast, explosive. Now I've mixed and blended it with more physical, bigger volleyball players as well. So there's a little bit of change there.

As far as your direct question would be I don't think it's changed a whole lot. It's still the same thing. I still know what the product that I want to put on the court looks like. So I just recruit kids to what that vision is.

Q. Ally, you're reunited with Tyler Hildebrand again. What do you like about coaching from him? You announced publicly you were going to USC before him. Did you kind of seal the deal and say come on back?

ALLY BATENHORST: I actually had no clue he was coming to SC. So I lucked out for sure. Obviously my freshman year at Nebraska he was my coach. He's just the same person he's always been. He's so passionate about what he does and he's just so encouraging and really I think something that's really special about him is he instills belief in his players. And I think that's something the whole staff at USC does a really good job at.

I think those are the best coaches are the people who believe in you and just give you a lot of encouragement and let you grow and just give you that space to grow.

I think I'm just super, super grateful to have such a great

coaching staff.

Q. What does Tyler bring to the team? Does he help you into the transition of the Big Ten? I assume you'll be working with him, with setters. Talk about has he had an impact already?

BRAD KELLER: All three of my coaches are elite, elite. And the only way, I learned this a long time, when you're in charge, you better hire people that are better than you and you have to be really okay with that. And I am completely fine with it.

Let me go through it real quick and I'll get to Tyler. But Megan Moenoa, I call her Momma Hen. She's the one, she has the pulse of the team. She understands this group inside/out. She's tough in a great way. She's actually maybe the most passionate out of all of us, even though she doesn't really show it.

And she is kind of the epitome of, I want a strong role model around my kids and she is that.

Spencer McLachlin comes from a famous family. He's a big time volleyball player, big-time coach. A lot of energy. He's very similar to Tyler. They're very passionate about the game. And that's what you're seeing is that they're just unapologetically them.

I do say this, they don't like it, have you ever seen the movie "Stepbrothers"? Do you know the scene where they look at each other and say, did we just become best friends? That scene, that's Tyler and Spencer. It's a comedy show between the two of them. They're just very, very passionate.

I think to answer your question about what Tyler brings. He brings head-coaching experience. It lets me branch off to do what I need to do. There's more relief there for me. I have three coaches where I can just turn them loose.

Here's the idea and you guys go get it done and we'll meet in a couple of days. And I give them full autonomy for that and I want to do that. They're all professionals. That's the thing. If you're a professional, you're going to get your stuff done and it's going to be good.

So that's what he has done. He's brought us up another peg. It's already complemented what we had. But "Stepbrothers".

MIA TUANIGA: That's the vital information, "Stepbrothers".

Just going off what Brad was saying, all of our coaches, they bring so much to the table. They're so inspiring. It's

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

not only what they're teaching us volleyball-wise; we learn so much through their story.

To talk more about Megan Moenoa. She's from Long Beach. Me and Adonia call her Auntie Megan. She hates it. But that's just the relationship that she's really grown to have with every single one of us. She is truly someone we all look up to and someone we all branch off of.

Like he said, she doesn't share it a whole lot but she's intense and she wants to win. And that's something that, it's contagious.

But going off of Tyler, I've known him for a very long time. He's coached one of my older brothers. I think I've known him since I think I was 5 years old. Just seeing him in the gym, it's like seeing another family member in the gym.

He's brought a lot of IQ and just brought a lot of leadership things. And I've actually learned so much from him this past spring. It's truly a blessing that he's decided to come and work with us.

Q. I hated 8:00 a.m. classes, and it's 8:30 back in LA right now. What's the time adjustment been like on this trip? And how can you prepare for that when you're come to go the Midwest and East Coast to play volleyball?

MIA TUANIGA: I think obviously, like Brad usually says, we don't know what we don't know. This little trip that we had, yeah, it was a little tough and everything, but I think we did a really good job trying to hype each other up.

We got up this morning, like, dang, but let's get it. Got some coffee. Played some music and we're hyped to be here. So whatever time it is, whatever tough travel day comes at us, we're going to be here to show each other support and keep each other hyped.

ALLY BATENHORST: We're definitely able to adapt. I think just going down to the basics, going to bed early, being smart, planning ahead. I don't think it will be a big struggle for us.

I think it's kind of nice when we go to Rutgers we gain time coming back. So yeah, it's not going to be a problem.

Q. Mia, what are your thoughts on the double contact rule change and how do you think that will affect things?

MIA TUANIGA: I'm not the biggest fan of that new rule. I think, personally, that there are certain plays in a game where if a setter goes and she doesn't double, that's

showing how much time she puts into her craft. I'm not saying that people don't put time in there; people do.

But it's like if we're going to change the double rule and let doubles slide, what else are we going to let slide? What rule is going to come next that lets us, well, we can do this too?

I'm not the biggest fan of it. It's not going to change the way I train. But rules are rules, right?

Q. With the move to the Big Ten by yourselves and a few other schools, you're not getting as many West Coast rivalries as you've had in the past but you are going to be playing at Nebraska, at Wisconsin, with those huge crowds they have. How will this move impact the fan interest along the West Coast and this sport?

MIA TUANIGA: I think I'm really excited. I think we're going to gain a lot of fans. The style of play that we're going to bring, I think a lot of people are just going to be a little shocked and a little intrigued about the stuff that we're going to bring. So I think we're going to gain a lot of fans. We might gain some haters, that's cool, too.

But the coverage you guys bring to the Big Ten is amazing. And I'm excited for that. I think when we talk about women's sports, vital thing we talk about is lack of coverage. Just being here and seeing how much you guys pour into the student-athletes, I'm really excited about that.

ALLY BATENHORST: I think you covered it all. I think the fan base in California is definitely growing. I think USC's growing a lot from what I've heard. I think obviously in the Big Ten there's huge fan bases, tons of people there and there's always just tons of coverage now and that's been amazing and a blessing.

And I think just having that on the West Coast and just having more opportunities to play in front of those fan bases, viewership, all that, I think it will be really amazing for our program and West Coast.

BRAD KELLER: I think the last part is, we are USC itself is a worldwide -- is a global brand. You could go to Australia and wear an SC shirt and someone would know what that is.

To now be able to be a program that goes to places where people don't know us it's only going to help grow volleyball and the viewership, I think it's a net positive all the way through, is what I would say.

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