

Big Ten Volleyball Media Days

Monday, August 5, 2024

Chicago, Illinois, USA

Penn State Nittany Lions

Coach Katie Schumacher

Jess Mruzik

Camryn Hannah

Press Conference



KATIE SCHUMACHER CAWLEY: It's always great to be back in Chicago. It's a great place. I love it here.

Thank you to the Big Ten. Commissioner, everyone involved in this, because it's such a special event, and I'm really excited to have these two with me today.

We're also welcome to the four new teams. I'm excited about them. All four coaches are great coaches. They're great programs. I think they're going to add a lot to this conference moving forward.

But thanks for having us. I'm looking forward to the season. Go Big Ten.

Q. Last year's team really gelled and the chemistry increased a lot as the season went on. What are you looking to fine tune for the beginning of this season?

JESS MRUZIK: We spent a lot of time together in the summer, which I think helped a lot. Last year we just had a lot of new pieces come in all at the same time in the summer, but we're lucky that our squad this year has mostly been together since January since our two freshmen graduated early.

We spent a lot of time together, and I think that helped boost our chemistry a little bit. Last year was a little bit of a mish-mosh of new pieces trying to find their place.

I think that was something that we were able to use to our advantage this year, and I think it'll help us out in preseason for sure.

Q. Jess, what was it like being part of the national team this year, playing in the Dominican Republic, and what did you get out of that experience?

JESS MRUZIK: Yeah, it was super awesome. I'm very

grateful to have had that opportunity. It's awesome to be on the same team for once with a lot of those girls. You play against, Lexi, Merritt, Sarah all the time, and it was cool to see them in a different way and be on the same team as them. I learned a lot from them.

I think they learned a lot from me, too, I hope. But it was awesome. It was a cool experience. I'm grateful to have done it, and I'm looking forward to implementing some things that I learned turning with them for this new season.

Q. Olympics are going on right now, some former Nittany Lions playing in the games. Do you have viewing parties? Do you discuss strategy? Do you say, that could be us one day or in the future? How does that camaraderie happen around these exciting games?

CAMRYN HANNAH: I think it's really cool to see people that have played in our gym and been in our position in that position, and it gives us more of an incentive to work hard every day because that could be us one day.

I think that's why we play volleyball, so little girls will look at us and think the same thing, so it's a cool chain of events to watch.

JESS MRUZIK: Yeah, it's cool to go to South Gym every single day. It's hot in there. We sweat it out. We get down and dirty in there.

It's cool knowing went through the same things we're doing, and we're just lucky to be able to uphold their legacy.

Q. You mentioned the four new teams, especially on the West Coast. What challenges logistically does that bring in terms of travel, but also is it exciting to add teams of that caliber to this conference?

KATIE SCHUMACHER CAWLEY: Yeah, logistically it's going to be a learning experience for everyone in how we're traveling, but I love competitive volleyball. I think, like I said earlier, all four teams are going to bring such great talent even more into this conference. I'm looking



forward to it.

Great coaches out there, and I'm excited to work with them. It'll be exciting.

Q. What was the hardest game you have played?

CAMRYN HANNAH: I would say mentally we played Michigan State last year, and that was a tough game for us. I think we all were a little bit tired. The season had been wearing on us. Getting through that together was a tough challenge.

But I would say physically probably the Nebraska match of last year because it was a long match, and it just wore on us on both ends, mental and physical.

Q. How beneficial was that experience overseas and what were some of the positives that you noticed from your team?

JESS MRUZIK: I think one of the positives is obviously team chemistry. We spent a lot of time together; literally didn't get a second alone for like 12 days.

But I think that was great for our team chemistry, and we were able to see once-in-a-lifetime things with each other, which was just a great opportunity.

It was also cool to see other countries' style of volleyball, and I don't think that's something that everyone gets to experience, so it was interesting to see how different countries play the game.

Q. Jess, going back to your experience in the DR playing with Sara, what is the balance or awkwardness of being friends with them and learning from them there and now being competitors and dealing with that when you see them on match day?

JESS MRUZIK: Yeah, I think there's just this level of respect and understanding that we have for one another, and we really appreciate each other and how much we all put into volleyball and our craft.

There definitely is a weird balance when we play them. Obviously I want to beat them, they want to beat us, but there's no disrespect between us or anything like that. I think that's pretty cool and unique, and I don't think you find that in every sport.

Q. We saw the potential last year with the National Championship match; had two freshmen setters. You bring Izzy in. What do you view as the challenges that she'll face to start her college career? And for the

players, what have your impressions been getting to know her early on?

KATIE SCHUMACHER CAWLEY: I think Izzy is a phenomenal player and I think she's going to do great. But it's always learning. It's always a learning curve. Whether you're a freshman or a senior, I think these guys are still learning some new things about the game.

I thought she had a great spring. Did a really good job in the weight room this summer. I am looking forward to seeing what she is going to do.

I know with the senior leaders that we have, I know they'll help her along the way, and I think that's really important.

CAMRYN HANNAH: I think that Izzy is a phenomenal player, whether she's a freshman or four years down the road when she's a senior. I think she's come in and she's taken on her role commandingly, and I love to watch her grow and learn us as players as well as learning how to communicate with us because we're older than her.

That's kind of awkward sometimes, but we're trying to push her to be more vocal and be herself on the court because that's what's going to help us get to those National Championship games like you've discussed.

JESS MRUZIK: Yeah, it's a hard role to take on as a freshman just coming in and being be a starter, let alone being the freshman setter. She has done such a good job, she never complains, never talks about it. She just loves her role, loves her job, and she loves learning, which I think is super cool, because as a freshman you do have a lot of learning to do. We still have learning, too, like Coach mentioned.

Q. What impresses you about Caroline and Maggie and what have they brought to the team?

CAMRYN HANNAH: I think Caroline brings a lot of punch to the ball. I watch her hit and I'm like, I would not want to be on the other end of that ever. I think Maggie is the exact same way. Both of them bring such a strong work ethic to our gym that it forces everyone to work harder, and that's exactly what we want bringing in new players.

I think they've been great additions, and they will continue to be.

Q. Coach, what was the recruitment of Caroline like? Did you have to sell her on Penn State or did you rely on her dad?

KATIE SCHUMACHER CAWLEY: No, I'm just happy we

got her the second time around. Caroline we recruited the first time and she made her decision. I think after she went to the portal we had her on campus, and I think she knew it was the right decision for her.

I'm sure her dad helped a little bit, but I know he wanted her to make that decision, and she's been amazing.

Q. What is a team goal for this upcoming season?

JESS MRUZIK: Win the Natty.

Q. Coach, your third year into this now. Talk me through when you took over this position what your expectations were then and how they've come to fruition, some changes, some differences and maybe good up expected things that have happened along the way.

KATIE SCHUMACHER CAWLEY: I mean, the expectations are, I think, always Hyatt Penn State, for me it's still to honor the alum and all of the work that Coach Rose did to put Penn State where it is today, and to continue to recruit great players that are great student-athletes and great people and are really great for the game.

Yeah, I think I'm always learning, too. I think that never ends. I think learning from other coaches and just being able to be with this group and help this group as much as I can, it's always -- I want them to leave and be happy about what they've done and excited about their future.

Q. Has there ever been a time where you didn't perform as well, and describe it.

CAMRYN HANNAH: It's a good question. Absolutely. You have your best days and you have your worst days. But I think that's the beauty of playing at this level, is that you can rely on your teammates to be there for you when you're not having your best day, and you can give yourself time to work your way out of that.

It doesn't have to be, I'm having the worst day ever and I'm going to continue to have the worst day ever. I can take a second off and my teammates can pick up the slack for me a little bit until I'm mentally ready and I'm giving them 100 percent of what I have in that moment.

Q. You guys have been around the Big Ten a little while. Aside from your home gym, where is your favorite place to play?

JESS MRUZIK: I really enjoy playing at Nebraska. I think what that state does for the sport of volleyball is super

awesome and I love their environment. It's a cool place to play. It's loud. A lot of people don't like it, but I really do like it.

CAMRYN HANNAH: I think my favorite place to play is Northwestern just because I'm from Chicago, so a lot of my family gets to come.

But gym-wise I think Minnesota is a really easy place to make yourself comfortable, and for that reason it would be my favorite.

Q. Coach, what have you seen from Jill, Ava, and the other DSs this off-season?

KATIE SCHUMACHER CAWLEY: Well, I think they've done a really good job of pushing each other. I think this will probably be one of the most competitive gyms we've had in a bit. I think they work really hard. They push each other, and I think they help each other to get better, too. It'll be exciting. Each of them will make an impact on the season.

Q. What would you guys say is something you need to improve a lot?

JESS MRUZIK: I think just our consistency. I think that's something that can always be improved. We talk about not having super high highs or super low lows; just finding that happy medium. You can beat a lot of good people playing just good volleyball. You don't have to play great or perfect every single night, but just getting back to good.

Q. Coach, I know it's not finalized, but the House settlement could change the way college sports operate. How do you see the potential it has to impact volleyball?

KATIE SCHUMACHER CAWLEY: Yeah, it's going to be a wild world. It's wild now. But I'm hopeful with how big volleyball is that we'll be taken care of and we can continue to do what we do and that these athletes get the support that they do.

Thanks to the Big Ten and all of the media outlets that play us and give us that exposure. I'm hopeful volleyball will continue to grow even bigger.

Q. What went into deciding to come back for a fifth year, and how would you gauge your comfort level in year two with the program?

CAMRYN HANNAH: I don't think I ever had to decide. I love playing at Penn State. If they give me six more years, I'll play six more years.

I think it's just fun. The environment, rec hall, the people I get to play with, the experiences I've had like taking a foreign trip, that stuff is fun, and I'll keep doing it as long as I can.

JESS MRUZIK: Yeah, I don't think we want to grow up quite yet, so it was a very easy decision for us to come back. Like Cam said, it's just an awesome place to play, and being able to play there for five months just didn't seem like that was enough time for us.

Q. Double contact, two liberos; what's your perspective?

KATIE SCHUMACHER CAWLEY: The double contact, well, I'm glad they switched it because we ran into some problems a couple years ago with our setting situation.

But yeah, the two libero rule, I don't know. It's hard enough for me to get one. I don't know if we're going to have two to be able to flip like that. No, the double contact, I'm happy about that.

Q. What is something you will do to make sure your team comes out on top?

KATIE SCHUMACHER CAWLEY: That's a good question. I think it's how you prepare as a coach. I think I have an awesome staff, but I think knowing that the coaching staff is committed to the team and we go above and beyond for these ladies and help them prepare as much as we can.

My goal is to help them be as prepared as they can to compete and put them in a position that they feel comfortable with what they're doing and how hard they work.

Yeah, I want them to be successful.

Q. What impresses you about each other's game and how valuable is it to have each other to lean on?

JESS MRUZIK: We were just talking about this. We just push each other every day. I think obviously physically she's a great player and we balance each other out really well. I'm pretty intense and she's pretty chill, so I think we have a good dynamic there.

But I think we help each other out a lot more mentally. I think we have a good relationship, and if I'm struggling I can go to her and ask for help and just be like, hey, I'm struggling, I need you to kind of pick up my slack a little bit here, and she knows I'll work my way out of it and vice versa.

CAMRYN HANNAH: I think Jess has a smorgasbord of different tools in her tool kit, so I think learning from her, being able to watch her do things, I'm like, how does she do that, and then I ask her and she'll tell me. It doesn't have to be a competition all the time. We can learn from each other, and that's the best environment to be in.

Q. Camryn, being a local Chicago product, going to Marist on the South Side, what's your motivating words to the youth at home playing in club, going around the area saying maybe one day they want to be in your shoes?

CAMRYN HANNAH: Yeah, actually one thing we were talking about is that club was so long ago and it seems like when you're in it, it's the only thing that ever matters. I think club is not -- doesn't have to be this daunting thing where everything that you do is being watched. It can be fun.

Like have fun with the sport and go play volleyball at different places and learn from different people because that's the way you'll get better, not just working at the same thing every day but learning new things and improving on those.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports