

2022 NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship

Wednesday, December 14, 2022

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

CHI Health Center Arena

Texas Longhorns

Coach Jerritt Elliott

Logan Eggleston

Asjia O'Neal

Press Conference



seventh-year seniors. It's been a really enjoyable moment every single day. I don't think there's been a year where I've been this happy to come in and practice like every single day.

Q. Jerritt and I talked in the preseason about how your second team, how great it was. And for both of you guys, was it like that this year, that the practices were the highest level in all the time you've been there?

LOGAN EGGLESTON: For sure, I think some of the toughest hardest competition we've seen is in our own gym. It's awesome because when you come back after playing a Big 12 match and get to come into the gym and play like a national championship level match in practice it's really cool.

And it's awesome to see our freshmen step up and really push our upperclassmen be better. They make amazing plays every single day. There's so much talent. It's making us all better and it's been like that since the very first day of practice.

It's really cool to see the improvement in the development throughout the whole season. But truly every single person on our team could be on the court and really contribute.

Q. The feelings now that you're here, what's it like? And how is it like being so close to your goal?

ASJIA O'NEAL: It's incredible being here. Obviously we made it two years ago, but with COVID it was very different. So all of us just having all these new experiences has been super fun -- it's very different. We've been enjoying it, but it's time to lock in and get prepared for our match tomorrow.

Everyone's extremely excited to be here, but we know that just getting here is not our ultimate goal. So it's really just dialing back in, enjoying, cheering for what we accomplished last week.

But we're at a clean slate and we have two matches to accomplish inevitably what we want in the end.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by head coach Jerritt Elliott and student-athletes Logan Eggleston and Asjia O'Neal. Coach, an opening statement.

COACH ELLIOTT: First of all, we're excited to be in Omaha. They put on a great event. Our players are fired up.

This is the 50th year of the Title IX. To see where the sport is growing and the development of the athletes, the number of athletes that are playing and the incredible eagerness of fans that are part of it it's special to see this sport grow where it's at.

We're obviously excited to be here. We have a special group that have been really loyal to one another and are fighting to get to the top of this mountain.

We've got a huge road ahead of us. We understand that. But I think we're in a really good frame of mind right now as we approach tomorrow night's match.

Q. Asjia, what's practice like at Texas, especially this year, with a roster so deep and so talented?

ASJIA O'NEAL: Our practices are pretty intense. I think our coaches do a great job at getting a really good practice run in every single day. Everyone's working extremely hard all the time. We have a lot of different lineups we do throughout practice.

It's really nice. It always changes because we're always playing against a different one of our teammates.

But the culture is very good. Everyone works extremely hard every single day from the freshmen all the way to our

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LOGAN EGGLESTON: It's a business trip. We're obviously going to enjoy all the fun things that come along with it. But we're here for one goal and that's the main focus. That's what -- we're going to give all our time and energy into is to winning it all. We're really excited to be here and excited to get to work.

Q. Logan, could you reflect on, at the high level you were even after last season, how have you become a better player this year? And second, could you talk about Texas' tradition? We see this sport has grown so much, it becomes harder and harder to make the Final Four, but you keep doing it. If you could address both of those, please.

LOGAN EGGLESTON: I've grown as a player in one year. I give a lot of credit to our coaching staff for putting some amazing, talented players around me that are pushing me every single day to be better.

Obviously we have Zoe and Emma who came in. They're amazing passers and defenders. I learn so much from them every single day. And Madisen is an amazing attacker, an amazing overall volleyball player.

I think having them in the gym I've learned so many new skills and so many new techniques that I hadn't seen in the past. And it's just really cool to get to add more and more things to my toolbox. And just being able to grow and just have so many more options of what I could do.

So I think Jerritt has done a great job surrounding us with really talented players. It's helping us all improve.

One reason we all come to Texas is to be in situations like this where we're competing at really high levels. And so this is not a surprise for us. I think we all are determined to get to this point in our season.

And so it's something that we strive to do. And if we don't make it there, it's a big disappointment for us. It's going to drive us to be even better next year.

I think the past few years not making it there has been a really big driver for some of the older girls, especially me, Asjia and Molly. But also the younger girls coming in knowing that this is the expectation for Texas and we have to compete at high levels and be really good in high-pressure situations.

It's what we came here for. It's exciting to be in those situations. And I'm really pumped to see how we respond and continue to improve over the next short time that we still can.

Q. Asjia, you walk these Big 12 national tournament streets with Logan. I know you're coming back next year, but this is your last weekend of volleyball with your girl. How big is it to send her out with one piece of her glittering resume that's missing, that's a championship?

ASJIA O'NEAL: That's ultimately the goal. Logan has done so much for the program. She's done so much just being a really good teammate and best friend for me.

So obviously we all have the goal of wanting to win, but there's no other way I would want to send Logan out. I think all of our team has that in the back of our minds, like, yes we want to win for us, for Jerritt. But we really want Logan, after her fifth year here to just be able to hoist that trophy at the end of it all and feel as if she accomplished everything that she set out to accomplish in her five years here.

Q. Logan, you've earned that respect not only from your teammates but from the national media, from your opponents. What does that mean to you to leave such a legacy, not only in Texas volleyball, but volleyball internationally and in this country?

LOGAN EGGLESTON: Obviously I'm biased, but volleyball is the best sport there is. It's great to see the attention it's getting. It's cool to be a figure that people talk about. I'm surrounded by so many amazing players and coaches and get to compete against so many amazing players.

Just to be a part of that conversation is just -- I'm very, very grateful for that.

It's cool, obviously I came to Texas to do really big things and to be in really big situations. And so it's cool to kind of have accomplished that.

But, again, I couldn't have done it without my teammates. All the awards I get and the conversations I'm part of, I couldn't do without the people behind me that are setting me up to be successful in so many situations.

So it's an honor to just get to play beside the people that I get to play with. They're the reason that I'm who I am. And so it's not me; it's all of us. Texas volleyball, we're doing it together.

Q. Logan, what do you remember from the 2021 spring season, playing in this building? And what ways can being here in this facility help you this time?

LOGAN EGGLESTON: It's definitely familiar walking in this morning seeing the whole arena. We've definitely been here before and didn't end the way we wanted it to.

It's definitely this kind of redemption arc. We want to leave this place happier than we did last time. But it's going to be completely different. We were here during COVID. There weren't a lot of fans. It was a totally different vibe.

So I think although we have been here before, it's a completely different year. And we're going to approach it a little bit differently, for sure.

But we're excited and walking into this gym definitely gave us a little bit of that taste what it felt like to not win. And we don't want to feel that way again.

Q. Could either of you talk about the job Saige has done this season leading your offense?

ASJIA O'NEAL: Saige does an incredible job. She's a really selfless center. She puts us all in incredible situations. She's one of those setters that takes, I don't want to say criticism, but she takes constructive criticism really well. She always wants to give us the best set possible.

There's so many times I say, Saige, it doesn't have to be perfect. We're all here to make each other better and you don't have to put this immense amount of pressure on herself.

But she holds herself to such a high standard and works extremely hard every single day. And the setter-middle connection is always really important. And I just feel like our closeness that we've gotten together this year, I've just really commended her on how hard she works every single day and how much she's given to this team and this program. And I'm glad that she's starting to getting the recognition that she deserves.

LOGAN EGGLESTON: I agree. I echo everything Asjia said. And on top of that she's an amazing competitor. You know every single time we step on the court with her she's going to bring 100 percent and push you to be better and just really inspire you by her actions and her words.

She's just super fun to play beside. It's just really awesome when you can trust your setter to always try to better the ball and put you in the best position possible. She's done an amazing job.

Q. Jerritt, have you been around an athlete that's been -- as Logan is talented, but one that's used their platform to make things better in the community

outside of the volleyball court and for people on campus to follow like they have Logan?

COACH ELLIOTT: It's a great question. I've been around a lot of players and Texas offers a lot of resources. And Logan has taken full advantage of that. Obviously she's an exceptional player, but she doesn't get to see the leader she is in our athletic department.

Her focus to be great at everything and want to be a part of everything has always been a concern for me because she puts so much on her plate. But she's been able to handle it.

And I know that you can ask anybody on our team, is Logan going to be successful. Without a doubt. As soon as the NCAA lets me invest in her and pay her some money out of my own pocket, I'm investing in whatever business she wants to start.

Q. An immensely deep team for you all this year, but you got two transfers from Nebraska in Akana and Caffey. What have they meant to you this season?

LOGAN EGGLESTON: So much. Obviously they're super, super talented players, but they're both amazing people. They just came into this team and fit in and just became a part of the family immediately.

And I think that's hard to do when you come, especially from a team with a little bit of rivalry, I guess, in the past. It's hard to come in and feel that way. But they just instantly came in and had such great energy and such great personalities.

And I think that's the biggest thing that contributed to this team. It's really been amazing friends and teammates, but obviously they're super talented. They've made super big plays for us the entire season. And they'll continue to do so.

They're just amazing people and getting the opportunity to play with them has been amazing for us.

COACH ELLIOTT: I think we knew they were skilled, right? But we wanted to learn what kind of people they were. And they're great human beings. They've been committed to our culture and what we want to do and have brought so much from a personality and experience standpoint.

When you get people that have been through the war a lot, they bring confidence. And so they brought what they learned from Nebraska to our program, just like Madi brought what she brought from Kentucky.

We had to blend all that in. That was our biggest challenge as coaches because we had 11 new players. And all the credit goes to our team and our captains because they've blended in really well.

And it doesn't feel like they've only been here a few months. They just are good human beings, and we love having them.

Q. Specifically, what is the division of labor among you and your assistant coaches? Who does what? What do you do, what does Erik and David do as specialties?

COACH ELLIOTT: We talk about the sport growing so much. I'm basically running an enterprise now. I've got 80 people underneath me and there's a ton of work that needs to be done. My athletic department allowed me to hire some phenomenal coaches.

Erik has been with the Olympics, was an Olympian. And David was there, in 2016 the head coach at Pepperdine.

When I worked with Pete Carroll at USC, I got to know him pretty well and watched a lot of his practices. And when I started having really good assistant coaches that really understood what we were doing, I made them coordinators.

Eric is our defensive coordinator. David is our offensive coordinator. And we meet all week and talk about the things we do. And they are in charge of those areas. And they can focus on those areas. I'm kind of hovering above them, helping manage it and helping any way I can. But we work as a team together.

Yes, I'm the head coach, but I give them a lot of flexibility to be who they are because they're great at what they do, and we all work really well together.

The most important thing I want to make sure is that our players see that, the confidence I have in our coaches and making sure that they're confident going into this and they feel that way with our coaches.

Q. Do you remember how the timeline played out with adding Kayla Caffey to your team because it seemed she joined your squad right before practice began?

COACH ELLIOTT: Yeah, she came in late. She obviously went into the portal and we called her and talked to her.

And we had to get all of our academic stuff in line. But she actually wasn't able to practice until almost the second

week of practice. So it was a mad rush to kind of get her in and see if we could get her in. She was able to do that. Worked out well.

She hadn't played a lot in the summertime. And so it took us a while to get her acclimated, get her body up and running.

Q. Not only with your team, but we see each of the finalists here have important players that transferred into the program. Is that the next evolution of the sport to embrace the transfers? And why did you take that approach with your team?

COACH ELLIOTT: Well, I think if you talk to any smart businessman, they're going to say businesses change. And the volleyball world is changing in terms of with the NIL stuff, with fundraising stuff, with the transfer portal. It becomes a lot.

And so we had to look to obviously replace Skylar Fields. We wanted to up our ante in the middle and get a bit deeper there, and most importantly we wanted to up our back court. Last year we struggled against Nebraska and Kayla aced us seven times in that match.

We look to kind of -- my job is to put the best team together. The biggest thing we talk about now as coaches is we try to protect our culture. We have wonderful kids and wonderful parents, and there's a great feel about it.

There's a lot that goes into the transfer portal. It's now one of the models that you have to, at least one of the buckets that you have to look at and consider as you kind of keep moving forward.

And you guys asked that question about how do we keep this thing going. My thing, I don't sleep very much and I'm always concerned about letting this thing fall apart. And it's relentless effort of every aspect of it all.

And so if there's a good kid in the portal that we feel can upgrade our program. I talk to our players because they know a lot of them, played with a lot of them. And try to see what kind of people they are. I think you'll see a lot of that happening.

Q. Asjia, Jerritt had a lot of good things to say about the way you blocked in the Ohio State match. Is that the new you, or what was going on against Ohio State with that?

ASJIA O'NEAL: At the beginning of the season, Jerritt pulled me aside and told me, you've been really good offensively but we need to lock in on your blocking; you

need to get better.

That's been kind of my kryptonite but I was a offensive-minded person. And this year I tried to dial into my blocking. I'm a middle blocker; that's my job. I know we can put a ball up to Logan, she's going to score.

During that match, obviously I wasn't hitting how I wanted to hit. But I was, like, I'm going to affect the game how I can and that ended up being blocking. I'm literally not going to let a ball come across this net and I went for it. I heard Jerritt in the back of my mind, Asjia, block the ball.

Q. What does San Diego do that impresses you?

COACH ELLIOTT: They've got an elite setter that transferred from Penn State. She was able to throw the ball all around. A lot of times when you run a fast offense you can kind of cheat or kind of clamp down on some of the pin hitters, but because she hits the ball so diversely and can set the long ball, she makes you play a little bit more neutral.

They've got a lot of good arms. They test the block a ton. And I think they're extremely confident coming into this match.

So they've got all the tools. They can pass. They can set. They've got great arms. They've got a good opposite obviously and are battle tested right now and doing good. We know we've got our work cut out for us.

Q. I was just wondering, from a big-picture standpoint, I know you've seen a lot of pro leagues attempt, come and go. Athletes Unlimited had their model. I think the Pro Volleyball Federation wants to start. How optimistic are you that that can happen and how important is that for women, in particular, to have a place to play professionally in the United States at some point?

COACH ELLIOTT: I know there's Athletes Unlimited, LOVB Volleyball has done a really good job in raising money. I think the model of what they have is pretty interesting. I haven't really dug into it. But it's accumulating a lot of the clubs. And so when you basically get a lot of numbers, there's an opportunity to raise some money or make money.

The attendance is always something of concern. The travel is extremely expensive, I know from our budgets. I think the geographical locations will be critical for that. I think the way or the mode of transportation will be critical for that.

But what we're seeing with ESPN right now and the excitement they're having with our ratings and what's going on with the sport, I'm excited for that.

Now, can we create a brand -- we all grew up as fans, whether it's the Lakers or, for me, the Dodgers because I grew up watching it -- to create something from the ground up is going to take a lot of time.

And I think they've got the right people in place. I say from my program, we need to recruit and we need a great culture and need to have a brand. Those are the three things. That's how we create longevity with our program.

So I hope we can do it. I think we've got all hands on board. I think they've got some smart people. I'm cheering for them to make it.

I know my players, we've talked about it a lot, they would love to be at home, playing and having those opportunities. But around any kind of professional league, it's extremely challenging, extremely expensive.

Q. What do you guys think about the match?

LOGAN EGGLESTON: Excited. I think San Diego is an amazing team. And obviously we've played Gabby before. We played Penn State when we were in Omaha a few years ago. We know she's a super talented player and she'll put their hitters in really great situations.

So we really need to show up and how we play. If we do the things that we do really well to get high level consistently over time, we can be in really good position to win this game.

It's going to be a super exciting game. There's going to be big crowd, lots of different pressure that we haven't felt this season. So it's going to be who can handle those emotions and handle that big of a stage, the best.

ASJIA O'NEAL: Yes, we're extremely excited. Like Logan said, there's that amount of pressure because it is the Final Four. Everyone's extremely talented here. But I think we've done a really good job throughout the season just improving and getting to a point where we feel as though we can take the pressure and we can deal with it and we compete at a high level.

So I'm really excited to see how we all come out tomorrow. I know we're all going to be locked in. But just going to go play.

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