

2024 NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship

Friday, December 20, 2024

Louisville, Kentucky, USA

KFC Yum! Center

Penn State Nittany Lions

Coach Katie

Schumacher-Cawley

Quinn Menger

Izzy Starck

Taylor Trammell

Championship Press Conference



QUINN MENGER: Yeah, I actually am coaching for my club this upcoming club season, but I don't know if coaching is a long-term job for me. Yeah, I love to coach, and I love the kids.

IZZY STARCK: Me personally, probably not right now. I'm still pretty young and everything and have a lot ahead of me. So you never know. In the next maybe three years, I might change my mind. Right now it's probably not best for my type of personality.

TAYLOR TRAMMELL: This past club season I was a club coach for our 15s at the Happy Valley United Club. It was really fun. I could totally see myself being a club coach later on.

I don't think I could do college. I don't think I could handle girls that are only like two years younger than me, but yeah, I could definitely see club coaching in my future.

Q. Were there coaches -- Katie included if you want it to be -- who influenced you along the way, and you thought, oh, coaching might be a good idea because of what I've gotten out of that?

TAYLOR TRAMMELL: I'll say my past coach, Coach Beerman, he passed away in COVID times. He definitely just pushed me to be the best player I am today, and he definitely molded me the most in my career, and I think he believed in me the most out of anyone.

He had a vision for me, something I didn't even see myself. Like when I was playing volleyball, okay, I could play in college. He had a vision of me playing in the Big Ten and playing for a top 10 team. He's been a role model for me that I constantly look back to in my career, and I'm super grateful he was in my life.

QUINN MENGER: I think a couple come to mind for me. Katie, Mike, Megan, they're all so inspirational, and our whole Penn State coaching staff.

Like for me back home, I would probably say my 16 national coach, Chris Wakefield. He was the first coach,

THE MODERATOR: We welcome the Nittany Lions to Friday, two days before the championship match. Opening statement from Coach on being here for the last game of the year.

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: Well, we're still happy to be here and be playing and looking forward to having another day tomorrow.

I think these guys are a little tired, but we'll have practice this afternoon. I'm proud of the way my team played last night. It was a great match. We're looking forward to Sunday.

Q. Katie, statistically, Louisville's match at Penn State was its worst of the year. They had a hitting percentage of .091. Obviously they've made a lot of progress since then. How do you keep your team from being overconfident when they easily won that time?

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: I think the first time we played -- Louisville is a much better team than the first time we played them. I'm not worried about this team being too overconfident. They know we need to play hard, and it's going to be a great match.

I think Dani and her staff do a great job. They'll be prepared and ready to go. I think it will be another battle. We have to win the serve-pass game and be able to control the ball on our side.

Q. For the players, do any of you want to be coaches?



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similar to Taylor, who pushed me to be great and saw the great in me before I did. That has inspired me to coach kids and see the great in them the same way that he did.

I'd say all of them, but yeah, those few couple come to mind.

Q. This is for the players. Not only are you playing in front of 22,000 people, what is it like playing in front of the world? The whole world is watching you guys at home cooking, having fun, and watching you play.

TAYLOR TRAMMELL: I just want to say it's really exciting. Not only that, but we're putting Penn State back on the map. I think this generation of girls have a really bright future. I know I'll be excited to watch what we do tonight and watch them in previous years.

The game of volleyball has just grown so much, and we're happy to be a part of that.

IZZY STARCK: I just think it's really exciting for the sport of volleyball, how much it's growing over the years and how there can be 22,000 people in an arena plus thousands of people around the country supporting us constantly, win or loss. I just think it's really cool how much support there is all around.

QUINN MENDER: I think it's awesome that everyone watches women's sports. It's great to see college volleyball getting the love that it deserves, and we're happy to be a part of it.

Q. How does conflict show up in team settings, particularly with this team? This is for all of you. And how do you work to resolve that?

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: I think this group has done a good job of being able to communicate well. We talk about that. Sometimes you have to have the hard conversations, and it's not just about playing time, it's about friendships and all of that stuff too.

They do a good job of wanting to have it done the right way, and they are open and tell each other if something isn't right and help each other along the way.

I think they resolve conflict pretty fast, and it's taken a while to do that. I think that's why this team gets along so well because they can handle their business. I don't worry a whole lot about the locker room because these seniors handle it.

Q. With these two days between the semifinal and final, when you win a match like you did last night, do

you want it to kind of continue maybe with a day in between, or does the two days kind of give you a chance to reset? I guess I ask the first part maybe because of momentum and adrenaline and such, do you want to continue that, or are you okay with having two days in between? Any of the players can answer that question as well.

TAYLOR TRAMMELL: Personally, I definitely need the rest. We are going off of three hours of sleep. Yeah, we need the rest in between. I mean, just for our bodies, and we get a whole bunch of great stuff like massages and nice things and, like, all this.

But genuinely, just to get in our mindset, and not only that, we were so focused on Nebraska it's like time to reset ourselves. And now we're putting all our energy and effort in focusing on Louisville. So, yeah, I definitely think it's important, and at least I need sleep.

Q. Katie, what do you expect from Anna DeBeer on Sunday given her injury? If she is not full go, how much impact does that have in your planning?

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: I hope she's okay. She's a fierce competitor that I know that, if she is able to go, she will play. Being a senior and being here in Louisville, I think, if she has the ability to compete, she will. If she's not, I know they'll still compete hard and have a couple of other leaders on the floor there that will push them and will them to do their job.

I hope she's healthy. I never like to see anyone injured, but she's a fierce competitor, and I would expect her to probably go.

QUINN MENDER: I would just say, yeah, I agree with Katie. I think, if she's at all healthy, she's going to play, and she's going to put her mind to it. We respect her so much as an athlete. Like she deserves to end better than that. I think we all kind of feel that way.

We're excited to play them, and we trust our coaching and our scouting report, and they get it down to a T. So we're going to be excited about it whether she's full go or not, but like Katie said, we hope she's healthy.

Q. Coach, I was going to maybe follow up a little on Lee's question he asked the players if they wanted to be coaches. I think it was about 25 years ago you were in their position playing for a National Championship in 1999. If someone had asked you then did you want to coach, what would your answer have been? If the answer then was no, what changed then to make you follow this career path?

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: I think my answer back then would have been I have no idea what I'm going to do.

I got into coaching right after I was done playing. I was a volunteer at Illinois with Don Hardin for a season. Then I went back to grad school at UIC, University of Illinois Chicago, and I was a grad student.

Just since then, I've loved being in the gym, and I've loved working with college kids and younger ones as well. I don't think it gets any better than this. I get to say I coach for a living and be in the gym and get to travel the world with these ladies and my family. It's really special.

So I love coaching, and maybe they will one day. I will say I have seen these girls coach club volleyball, and they're excellent coaches. The players in State College are so excited when these guys come around. They come to the matches, and there's quite a few that travel to see these guys play yesterday and then are coming Sunday.

They make an impact in the club volleyball world and our little town of State College.

Q. Katie, coaching as a mom, it's more than just two women playing against each other on Sunday, both moms. Can you tell me a couple of specific things that you can recall, especially maybe when the girls were younger, where it was really hard to be the coach that you are because of them and the things that you had to do maybe? And you've missed a lot because of that. I know you don't miss a lot because of how hard you work at it, same for a lot of the other coaching moms.

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: For me, I think it's always been able to have that balance. I'm fortunate that my husband, Mike, is so great and has been in sports as well and he understands this. He's like our number one fan for sure.

My mom is living with us right now and helping out. I think to have the support staff that I have with not only my family but my assistant coaches and our director of ops and everything that's involved in Penn State volleyball is what makes it easy.

You know, I do miss some things, but my kids are here and got to fly down with us in our private plane. So it all pays off. They're happy to be a part of this. I think they're at the age where they understand that I'm not going to be home or things like that, and they're okay with that if this is the result.

Q. I know that for most of us in the media it's been a little bit of a tough turnaround. I imagine for all of you sitting up there, it's been even tougher. I'm curious, what was it like just waking up this morning? I'm sure it was an exhaustive state but probably one of the best states you've ever been in.

TAYLOR TRAMMELL: I'll definitely say, after the win last night, I couldn't go to bed. I was up until like 5:00 a.m., just scrolling, looking at all the posts, looking at all the angles they took the win from. It's still like a dream come true.

Yeah, we were just super excited, and my body's adrenaline was not leaving at all. Then we go to bed and I had three hours, and then we wake up and it was the All-American banquet, like go, go, go.

I feel like in times like this you have to enjoy it all because this is once-in-a-lifetime stuff. It's just like soaking it all in. It's super nice.

IZZY STARCK: Yeah, I did the same thing, just scrolling through all my texts with all of my family and friends when they contacted me and everything. Waking up to even more because they were asleep because of how the match was and everything. It's just so awesome, just all the support and love I have behind me. It gets me really excited for the championship on Sunday.

It's crazy to say I'm playing for a National Championship on Sunday because a year ago today, if I would have known this, I wouldn't have believed myself at all.

QUINN MENDER: I'd say the same. The turnaround is definitely quick, but for me it was easy to wake up because I got to celebrate my teammates at the All-American banquet, and that's like super special. Like Izzy said, we get to compete and live another day, and that makes waking up a lot easier. Yeah, that would be my answer.

Q. Last night after the match, John Cook cited both you and Dani as coaches who had been part of a National Championship team before they started their coaching careers and yours. Another person who fits that criteria to this point, potentially for something further down the road, is Megan Hodge Easy. What do you see for her?

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: I think Megan's a Penn Stater. No, I think Megan just came back two seasons ago, and I'm so lucky to have her back in the gym and back in the community. I know her and her family are really happy in State College, but if she wants to move on and coach somewhere, she'll have opportunities, as well as Brian and Mike.

I'm so supportive of my staff and helping them achieve their goals and dreams. I know someday they'll want to be head coaches, and I know this experience and being a part of Penn State will help them.

But for now they're staying (laughter).

Q. Taylor, you met Haleigh Washington for the first time yesterday. What was that experience like, and what was her message to the team?

TAYLOR TRAMMELL: I'll give some background. I was in a group getting my DoorDash, and I bumped into her in the elevator. And I was totally in awe and like how am I meeting a gold medalist in a group and my bonnet and glasses?

But, no, she's super amazing. Her energy is everything. Even in the elevator when we were in there for, like, 10 seconds, I was like, oh, my gosh, she's giving us so many words of wisdom.

You get star-struck. At least being a middle and her history here, I didn't know how to act. If I get to see her again, I hope I can make a better impression because I was just looking ugly.

Q. Katie, if you could go back in time and talk to your younger self, what nuggets of advice would you give her about the journey of life you've been on, from two-sport athlete at Penn State, national champion, to coaching your alma mater into a National Championship while battling cancer?

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: What would I tell my younger self? I don't know, to maybe be kinder to yourself sometimes and not take everything so hard.

I've been really fortunate. I've been surrounded by a lot of great people in my life. I come from one of the most supportive families with always encouraging. I grew up thinking I could do anything, and that's because of my parents and my whole family.

I don't know, I think just put yourself out there and continue to meet people and be the best person you can be.

Q. Coach, I guess 12 hours or so have passed. Have you had a chance to reflect on the importance of Sunday with two women coaching teams in the final, one of you is going to be a national champion, and really the impact that could have for coaches and maybe players like your own and what that means in terms of opportunities?

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: No, but you guys keep saying that, so now I am. No, I'm super -- I'm just super thrilled to be representing Penn State with this group of girls. Thanks to you guys, all of you here that write about us and do all these great things for volleyball, we appreciate that because it's you guys helping us to get out there.

The fact that we've been on TV a ton this year and Sunday's match is on ABC, I don't think it gets any better than that. I guess it hasn't really sunk in yet. Maybe Sunday when we walk out there.

No, I'm just excited for this team to be able to compete one more time together and to really enjoy it and to leave it all out there.

Q. Since September, what is one thing about your personality you've seen change or maybe adapt to the circumstances that you would like to talk about?

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: I think I always have good balance. I think that's something that I've always had in terms of being able to separate life and volleyball and what's really important. But sure, I think this has maybe made me take a step back and really, really appreciate the little things.

I always say that because I think sometimes life goes so fast and you don't really see the little things. I think it's just even the encounters or having coffee or just having that five-minute conversation with a player or a staff member or anyone, really, to actually just enjoy it and be present.

I think that's the one thing I've said all season is be where your feet are. For these guys it's hard because I feel like the social media thing is insane. We have some rules with not having their phones when we're eating a team meal and things like that because I like to hear them talk and ask silly questions, what would you do? Played our Mafia game.

No, I think just to be present and to be really mindful of that.

Q. I know the '99 championships come up a lot. Have you been able to reflect and kind of allow those memories to flood back? Also, I guess piggy-backing on that, a lot's been talked about the growth of the sport. Can you tell us what you experienced in 1999 as a player and what you're seeing your players experience now from the travel here to the press to the TV to the swag to whatever it is? Like what's changed?

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: We didn't have little nail stations and candle making and hats, but I think -- I mean, the experience I had in Hawaii was we played in front of a lot of people as well. I think that's the exciting part for these guys.

I mean, the growth of the sport is insane. We have a group chat with my '99 team, and there's quite a few of them coming down. I'm so excited to see them. They talk about how big the players are now. We thought being 6-foot was big back then. That's the first thing they say about the players.

I just think the sport has opened a lot of doors for a lot of people and a lot of young women, whether it's in coaching or having the opportunity to play is really special. Even the amount of club teams we see now, and even girls that aren't going on to play in college that are playing club volleyball because they love the sport. It's a really, really neat time to be a part of it. I'm happy to be in it.

But Hawaii was fun. Hawaii was a blast. I will say I would love for them to experience the win after and all that stuff because it doesn't get better than that.

Q. Izzy, I'm curious what you thought of C.J.'s performance last night, and how important was her competitive fire against her former team?

IZZY STARCK: I think she stepped up to the occasion really well. Last time we played Nebraska, she stepped up, and she was needed when we needed her. I think she said the same thing, we need to spread the offense out. We can't always rely on our two great pins on the outside.

The passing isn't there, you can't run the middle, so you've got to back set. I think she did a really good job of finding ways around their block and everything. Even when they were on her completely with four hands, she found a way to mix in shots and everything.

When she wasn't scoring, when she was getting blocked, I go back to that one point -- I re-watched it this morning actually -- I know (laughter). It was 24-23, and she goes up and just fearlessly swings. She gets blocked. It goes out by an inch, and that's determining going to a National Championship or going to a fifth set.

I think she just did such a good job of not being scared of the ball or just going down swinging because that's what we always talk about as a team.

Q. Coach, I'll also second, if NCAA could get back to Hawaii for a Final Four, all of us in the media would be

happy too. This is a question for the players. And forgive me because to you guys a coach is a coach, male or female, you've had all of them, and Coach is maybe tired of hearing this, but outside of volleyball, what I've been hearing all morning is, wow, a woman coach hasn't won this when you think how many great women players there have been. To your generation, what does it mean? You're going to be in a historic match. You're playing for a National Championship, but whoever wins, that's history in your sport. Does that mean something to you as young women?

TAYLOR TRAMMELL: For sure. Katie is paving the way for us. If we want to go into coaching, it shows there is a pipeline and a pathway we can follow as well, just like her, to be successful. To all the little girls out there, hey, I want to be a big D-I coach, they can do it.

I think that Katie out of anybody sets the best example ever for somebody who can handle it all given to her.

Yeah, I'm excited to see what happens. Whoever's coach wins, you have two teams that love their coach very dearly. I'm excited to see us be successful for each other and see what happens.

QUINN MENDER: Yeah, I second that. It's really easy to train and learn from them because they've been to the mountaintop that we chased since we were eight years old. That makes it very easy, and I'm glad that like women's coaches are starting to get some recognition. I think that's awesome.

Q. Have you spoken to Russ since last night?

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: Oh, yeah.

Q. And?

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: He's so happy, but it was too late to have a drink and a cigar, so he was waiting until today.

No, he's thrilled for us. Just excited for this group and excited for Penn State.

Q. Any chance tomorrow night no hat, go bald?

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: I'll keep my hat, I think. Although I got real hot last night, I'll tell you that. I'll keep my cap for now.

QUINN MENDER: She looks pretty without it on.

Q. For the players, have any of you gone back to look



at Coach's performance in 1999? If so, how would you scout her? What would you say about that?

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: The film's a little gritty. They can't really. (Laughter).

QUINN MENGER: She's a fierce competitor. She would be hard to play against. We definitely watched her and Megan's film time and time -- and probably too many times.

We look up to both of them so much. I think they both are intense and competitive, and that's what makes us so good is because we learn from them. Yeah, it's super fun to watch and learn and be a part of it.

TAYLOR TRAMMELL: I think it's really funny too, like seeing the really competitive side of your coaches. Like we see them on a day-to-day as moms and with their kids, and I see Megan with like crazy color contacts for Halloween and Katie is doing something crazy, and we hear the stories from the other players and their lives. It's super interesting just seeing them back in the day.

We want to be like them, so I don't know, it's super cool.

IZZY STARCK: Yeah, I don't think I'd want to block against Katie or Megan, to be honest. I don't think I'd have a very good blocking night.

Q. Coach, what impresses you about Elena Scott, and what are your thoughts on that libero battle between her and Gill?

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: Again, I think they're both fierce competitors, and they're all over the floor. I think Elena Scott has been tremendous this whole season. She's an exceptional player. She wins big points for them, and I think Gill has gotten so much better from last spring to now. I'm really proud of what she's done.

I don't think she's talked about enough. She's done some great things. She passes. I think her serving has gotten so much better. She scores on the end line.

I think it's going to be a battle. They're both great players. It's going to be a lot of fun to watch them.

Q. Taylor, how does it feel to be playing in your home state? Have you gotten a lot of messages from friends, family, showing up for Sunday's match?

TAYLOR TRAMMELL: Yes, it's just exciting to be back here in Kentucky to finish it all. I had a reporter yesterday that said he filmed me when I was back in high school in my hometown. I was just like wow.

Volleyball is such a small community, and the love and support I've been receiving is everything. My family takes up a whole entire row with their posters. I love them so dearly for traveling up here. Kentucky always has such a sweet place in my heart being away for college all these years. I'm just super excited for Sunday.

Q. I almost forgot to ask you a pretty important question. You played these guys already. What's different from two months ago, three months ago, whenever? It's forever ago.

KATIE SCHUMACHER-CAWLEY: I think they're -- I know they're a much better team than when we played them the first time in preseason. I think we're a much better team than the first time in preseason. It's going to be a battle.

I know they'll be excited. Obviously playing in front of our home crowd. We'll have a nice Penn State crowd. I expect nothing less than a great match. Yeah, they'll be ready, and we'll be prepared. It's on ABC. We'll be able to write some nice articles about this.

No, we're looking forward to it. But they're a great team, and I'm excited it's them and us.

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