

# Big Ten Volleyball Media Days

Monday, August 5, 2024

Chicago, Illinois, USA

Illinois Fighting Illini

Coach Chris Tamas

Caroline Barnes

Raina Terry

Press Conference



CHRIS TAMAS: Year eight, great to be here. Thanks again to everyone for supporting our sport. Just came back from Paris, watched the Olympics, and the game internationally is awesome. I think you guys help catapult USA Volleyball in that regard, as well. I do appreciate that from all the media that are here and looking forward to a great season with the team.

As mentioned, we've made several tournament runs. We've been in the top half of the Big Ten, but that's not good enough for us. We want to get back to the top. The last couple years we've kind of been dealt the injury bug a little bit, and we get another shot, and that's all you can ask for.

The conference is going to be as good as ever, and we welcome that challenge.

We've got just a great opportunity this year to do some really great things on the court. Really happy with how the spring went and how the summer from what I hear has developed, and I've got two great players next to me that are going to help us get to where we want to go.

**Q. Coach, as you stated, you just got back from Paris. Any lessons that you took from your experience there that you brought back to your players or stories or interactions to motivate and say this is something I saw there or learned there or a conversation I had that is something that's applicable for your team?**

CHRIS TAMAS: Yeah, I got to hang out with Jordan a little bit. They had some time in between their games, which was awesome. After they played their game against Serbia, I got to hang out with Jordan and her family a little bit and got some inner workings with what was happening there, and I was talking to our players at breakfast and it's a lot of the things we talk about, as well.

I think the lessons that we learn, either what we see on the court or what we know from behind the scenes is we're on the right track and we're on -- the messages that we relay to the team are similar to what you hear at the highest level.

It's about getting out there and executing and trying to be better than you were the year before. In our case maybe a little bit healthier than we were the year before or a couple years before.

I think those are the biggest things, and it's always just about perseverance and getting back out there. It's three sets by two points, marathon ran by a bunch of sprints, try to be better than the next team, by the next point every time you get out there.

So a lot of the same lessons, and it was an exciting place to be, as Big Ten is going to be exciting this year, as well.

**Q. You talked about how the injury bug sort of hit you guys hard the past few seasons. How is that doing this year?**

CHRIS TAMAS: Yeah, I don't comment on what's going on just as a generality, but it's been good. We've got a lot more depth this year. That was one of the things we wanted to do was get more depth, and we did.

And we got a lot more players that are either able to play different positions, we've with got a lot more depth in other positions where we've gotten knocked out in the last few years.

If something does happen, we do have other players that are able to step in. The gym has been very competitive from what I understand in the summer, and I'm looking forward to getting in the gym with them.

I asked them this morning, what are you guys looking forward to, just head coaches being back in there and getting after it and being together, so we're looking forward to that.

**Q. When did you get back, and how are you feeling?**

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CHRIS TAMAS: Last night, and lots of coffee and fine.

**Q. What's that experience like to watch your former players, to watch so many Big Ten players and players as old as Jordan Larson?**

CHRIS TAMAS: Yeah, it's great. It's really interesting in that our career kind of expands over a lot of the national team, and Jen, my wife, played with Jordan back when we wife was still in the gym and Jordan was just a young pup in that gym.

So we were able to talk to a lot of them. Coached Justine when we were at Nebraska and obviously Jordan at Illinois.

You've got so many players that are from the Big Ten that are there competing. It's no surprise to us that are in this conference because we're used to those environments, and in those arenas it was 10,000, 11,000 plus each night, and it's much like we face in the Big Ten. It's great to see all the Big Ten that's represented.

I think volleyball has always been a great sport in that regard. There's a lot of intertwining, either with USA Volleyball competing here in the Big Ten, these players know each other from the club days, so it goes way back.

It's always just what's really kept my passion for the sport, as well. We're just looking forward to keep being a part of it.

**Q. Caroline, you've returned a lot of serves in your time. What is the most difficult serve to return and why?**

CAROLINE BARNES: I would say a nasty float serve is going to be harder than anything else in my opinion. You never know where it's going. It has a lot of movement. We have a lot of players in our conference who -- Raina included -- who have honed that skill a lot. Definitely a lot of pressure, and yeah.

**Q. Raina, take me through the process of deciding to come back for your last year. Was it a tough decision? What kind of factored into it? What are you looking to get out of this year?**

RAINA TERRY: Yeah, I get this question a lot. My answer is the same every time. It was probably the easiest decision I've ever made in my life. I'm very fortunate that I have such a great coaching staff that made that decision so easy and such great teammates that made that decision so easy for me.

But yeah, it was a super easy decision.

**Q. Coach, you added two setters from the portal. When you're looking at the portal at setter specifically, what are you looking for and what appealed to you about the two that you got?**

CHRIS TAMAS: Yeah, we always want to have enough, like I said, positions that we're able to run with and making sure if we did get hit with the injury bug, heaven forbid, that we've got enough positions.

But I think every position you're looking for that something that you want out of that position, obviously. As setters, we want setters that are good under pressure. We want setters that are good with their location. We want setters that are really great teammates, great leaders, and just kind of going through the list of who was available in kind of the portal opening. Found two great ones in Raegen and Vivian and help support Brooke in her role of setting, as well.

They each have a little bit of match experience, too, and I think that's also great when you're looking at setters.

**Q. Chris, the Big Ten got a lot bigger. How do these four new West Coast teams affect your job in terms of recruiting and scheduling and your players, as well?**

CHRIS TAMAS: It makes it, I think, almost -- the same. It's not that these teams are way better, way worse. It's the same. You're just going to add four more that are also very good.

The difficulty I think for a lot of teams is going to be -- the other question we always got maybe last year, how are you going to handle the travel. Well, we didn't know until we actually got the schedule a couple months ago.

And to be honest with you, I think it's -- yeah, a couple trips might be a little bit tougher than the other ones, but it's going to be relatively the same. I think during the season you're always trying to figure out, how much can I practice, how much do we need to rest, how much do we need to recover to get ready for this next big-time matches.

There's no match that you can just show up and waltz into be like, oh, yeah, we've got so and so tonight. No problem. No, every match you have to show up for, and it's been that way ever since I've been in it really.

Every year the conference has gotten better. The quote-unquote "weaker" teams traditionally now have gotten better, too, and I think you're seeing some really great volleyball night in and night out.

We'll handle it the same. The big difference is you don't get a return shot on a lot of them. I think that's going to be an interesting thing moving forward because you could catch someone at the beginning of the season when you're on a roll and maybe there's an injury somewhere and all of a sudden someone is out and that could kind of change how that rolls.

Again, the big thing for us is going to remain healthy and that's going to remain the same thing for everyone, and making sure you're hitting those rest-recovery cycles well and just be really prepared to adjust your systems and your styles or to execute as best you can, any environment that you're in that night, because you're only going to see them once with the exception of a few teams.

And I think that's going to be the biggest challenge a lot of us are going to face besides maybe just the amount of travel that we have to do.

**Q. Caroline, you've had sisters play at a very high level. I was wondering if you could talk about how that's pushed you as a player and if your perspective has changed now that you're in your fourth year.**

CAROLINE BARNES: I have two older sisters that played. One was at Marquette, one was at Wisconsin. It was incredible to grow up to watch them play. They are such good role models for work ethic, and my one sister is a national champion, so how much cooler could that get. So that was an incredible experience to go through with her when I was a freshman and she was a super senior. (Audio interruption).

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