

Big Ten Volleyball Media Days

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

Wisconsin Badgers

Coach Kelly Sheffield

Sarah Franklin

Devyn Robinson

Press Conference



KELLY SHEFFIELD: (Mics muted.) Twice as they enter the party, and ESPN and FS1. So having the different platforms that are getting behind us is something that's really exciting.

This year we'll have the AVCA Showcase, the First Serve in Louisville, and the leadership of Jamie Gordon to make that happen. We're excited about being a part of that. Then a few days later we're playing with Fiserv Arena against Texas and Stanford.

So playing in big arenas and playing in front of big crowds on great networks is something that so many people have worked hard to make that happen, including the NCAA committee and all their work to continue to grow the sport.

We're excited about what is in front of us. We've got two great athletes in Sarah and Devyn, who are two of our three captains this year, along with Julia Orzol, and we're happy to be representing our program and our university and our state to be here.

Q. Sarah, how are you feeling? How's your ankle? What's the recovery process and what's your timeline?

SARAH FRANKLIN: I'm feeling good, ready to go for the season. And we get to play it by ear, see when I'll be back. But shouldn't be too long, too crazy.

Q. Sarah and Kelly, Devyn, Anna, and Julia are some of the last elder stateswomen of that 2021 National Championship team. What does their leadership on this team mean to you guys?

SARAH FRANKLIN: I think their leadership is very valued, and they know what it's like. They've been in both points of it, winning and losing, and to lean on them and to be able to kind of know what it's like on both sides of it I think is going to be really good.

And getting into the latter half of things, they know what it takes to get to that point, so I'm really excited to see that and how it grows throughout the season.

KELLY SHEFFIELD: Yeah, we finished the year, the last five years ranked in the top five in the country. There's not another volleyball teams that has done that. There's not a football team that has done that, there's not a men's or women's basketball team that has done that. So there's been a lot of success there.

We were one point at Nebraska, I think we had match point to win a match, which would have tied us for our fifth Big Ten title in a row. So this group has accomplished a lot.

With that said, there's also been a lot of disappointing finishes where we haven't played our best volleyball at the end of the season when our best volleyball is required.

So we have a lot of players that are driven to rewrite the script, if you will, or change it a little bit going into this year.

The leadership is going to be one of our strengths. Our experience is going to be one of our strengths. We're going to need that. We're going to need players like you mentioned Devyn and Anna and Julia, people like Sarah that weren't on the 2021 but they're very talented, we're going to need them to show the same type of leadership and drive and consistency that some of the players before them took.

There's a difference between being really, really good and being really close and being the last one standing, and it's really, really hard to do. There's only been 12 programs in our sport that have ever been able to do it.

We're excited about the challenge. As much heartbreak as there's been the last final minutes the last two years, I'm excited to take this group for one more chance.

Q. Kelly, you said this summer on a radio interview this might be your most talented team. You've had championship teams, you've got Olympians. Can you go through some of your players on the lineup and



explain why you think this is your most talented team?

KELLY SHEFFIELD: There's a lot of experience, a lot of firepower. We've got more arms than probably -- we've returned most of our arms from last year, they're just a year experienced, so hopefully that helps us.

We're physical. I think we've got some really good talented setters. If we can stay healthy, if we can -- everybody singing the same song, then we're going to have ourselves a chance.

But this is as talented as what we've been able to do. It doesn't guarantee anything. We've got -- when the rough waters come, how are you? Are you staying together?

That '21 team was able to stay together when it got to be really, really tough, and we saw that at Texas last year when they were in the Sweet 16 and I think they had match point against them and they were able to stick together and find a way and not panic. Sometimes those are easier things said than done.

Q. Sarah and Devyn, going off what Kelly was talking about a minute ago, with all the success you've had, how much drive have you had this summer coming back to try to get back to that mountaintop?

DEVYN ROBINSON: I feel like there's such a sense of urgency and there's no room for hesitation. If we're going to go for something we have to go all the way in, and I feel like all of us have that mentality that we need to be the best versions of ourselves if we want to get the goals that we're setting for ourselves.

SARAH FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think putting aside kind of everything that gets crazy, life happens, things happen. I think leading into this season, no one is worried about that aspect of things. Everyone is worried about this team, what we can do together, and how far we can go.

So I think it's really exciting to know that everyone is on the same page there and that we're not letting anything get in our way this year.

Q. You have two players in the Olympics right now in Dana and Carlini. What's been the thought of watching them? Do you watch them together as a team and say, that's me one day? Do you sit with the freshmen or the young recruits and say, being part of this program can get us to that point? When you watch it together, are you taking notes? Are you comparing and contrasting with each other with your former teammates?

SARAH FRANKLIN: I think a lot of the games have been at various times so it's hard to get everyone together to do that, but we love having dialogue about this kind of stuff.

We'll watch it and be able to talk about what things worked well for them, what things didn't work well. And to see people who have been in our jersey up there, it makes it very realistic for a lot of us to be able to look towards that once we finish our college careers.

DEVYN ROBINSON: Yeah, seeing Dana in the Olympic jersey is really inspiring to me because I've looked up to here ever since before I even committed to Wisconsin. She's a big reason why I came here, and to see her living out her dreams is just adding fuel to my fire to feel like I played with her, I know what she did to get to the spot that she's at, and I can do those things, too.

Q. Sarah and Devyn, obviously there's a lot of experience up front and some youth at setter in the back row, and Saige is returning, as well. How do you blend the inexperience with the experience?

SARAH FRANKLIN: I think it's about keeping everyone on the same page. I think we do a really good job having the new people coming in, understanding that they are new, they aren't young. They are here to bring what we recruited them for.

There's a lot of value in that. There's a lot of value in having fresh minds, someone who maybe doesn't see or know all of our details to start because we can learn from that, too. It's great to have all those new perspectives.

I think having a little bit of both, of bringing them under our wing and getting them into our response and culture but also learning what they bring to the table outside of that.

DEVYN ROBINSON: It's instilling confidence in our younger players because I know coming into an elite gym like ours is kind of intimidating. Just letting them know like, we are all on the same team. We're all family. We're all sisters. We've got each other's back. I know you're here for a reason, and just instilling that confidence in them.

Q. Sarah, you've got some rings on. What are you wearing there?

SARAH FRANKLIN: Just a couple. We have three rings. We have the national semifinal from last year, 2022 Big Ten Championship, and then the AVCA First-Team All-American ring. And Dev has...

DEVYN ROBINSON: Yes. I have 2022 Big Ten Championship, '21 National Championship, 2020 Big Ten

and National Championship again, but with the Big Ten on the side and our Final Four ring.

Q. Have you had a chance to work with Charlie? What are your impressions of her and what she can bring to the team?

DEVYN ROBINSON: I am really impressed with what I've seen with her this summer getting in the gym and just working on our connection. She's just really talented, and I'm really excited to see how with Kelly's coaching and with just being around our Badgers like myself and Sarah, like how she's blossom into the player that I know she's capable of being.

SARAH FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think it's just fun to watch her. She has such a calming demeanor when she is on the court knows and she knows what she's doing, she knows what her goals are, and she does a really good job at executing that.

So it's a lot of fun to watch, and I'm excited to continue getting on the court with her.

Q. If you have a talented roster, what do you think will be some of the big factors that will determine how successful the team is this year?

KELLY SHEFFIELD: I mean, health is always a factor. That was one of the things that Nebraska was able to do, is one of their starting outside hitters went down for the season and they were able to handle that adversity and continue to go and finish 19-1 in the league.

Adversity is going to hit. It always hits. And how are you when it does. Are you able to stay together.

We mentioned earlier, I think one of our strengths will be our diversity in a lot of different ways. Very diverse team. Probably as diverse as I've ever had. We want to celebrate that.

But we talked about it. It's every player kind of brings their own talent, their own musical instrument, if you will, to the party, but you've got to be playing the same song. Even though everybody has a different instrument.

We've not always been playing the same song. When the margins are so thin, like they are in an elite conference like this, and it's about ready to get gnarlier with these four West Coast teams coming in, you'd better handle adversity, and you'd better be singing the same song.

Q. A lot of teams can manage to put together a good season here and there and maybe twice in four and

five years. This program is going on a decade plus of remarkable volleyball, especially the last five years. From each of your perspectives in this program, what's the key to sustained excellence?

DEVYN ROBINSON: I feel like just strong leadership over the years and up keeping our culture and just letting people who come into the program know what's what and understanding the foundation that's been set and up keeping that.

I feel like Sarah, Julia and I are letting our freshmen know what the standard is, what our culture is like, and just having such a great and vibrant culture at Wisconsin has been a big key part of this.

SARAH FRANKLIN: Yeah, the culture carrying through that long period of time is a testament also to all the recruiting that is being done, because when you're getting recruited here everything is laid out on the table. This is how we operate. This is how do things. If you don't like it, maybe it's not for you. But this is how we do things.

So when you come here, you know you're going to have to work your butt off. You know you're going to have to fit into the culture. You know you are going to have to grow your character, your skills, all these different things.

You know you are going to have to push yourself to do that. Guess what, it's not going easy. That's the people that love this sport and that's the people that love to do that here.

So I just love that we have so many people that have done that year in and year out.

KELLY SHEFFIELD: Word.

Q. Kelly, you mentioned the addition of the four teams and the expansion of the conference. What challenges and maybe advantages does that bring for you guys?

KELLY SHEFFIELD: Well, I mean, they've won championships, right? You look at the history of those teams and the Hall of Fame coaches that they've had in the past and the fan bases, I'm sure for each of them, they have high expectations.

You want to be a part of something where it matters. It matters to everybody. I know right now it can get lost that football and maybe basketball is the only sport that matters right now. Certainly when you're opening up about any article, it certainly is more that than it's ever been.

But we have choices right now of which way we're going to

go in different sports at any of these schools, and it certainly seems like volleyball is being leaned into as much if not more from so many administrators and fan bases where the allocation of resources are, which is going to be important.

I'm excited. I've never played at UCLA. I'm excited about that. There's not too many places in my career I've not competed at. That's one of them.

I'm excited to go back to those other three programs because they're awfully talented with some really good young coaches leading the way.

Q. Devyn and Sarah, you've been to this event before. I wanted to hear how this event has grown in your eyes the last couple years and what it means to be on the forefront of growing women's college volleyball.

SARAH FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think I was part of the first Big Ten two years ago, and I think seeing how much more is being poured into this from the aspect of media, from the aspect of where we stay, from the aspect of how much everyone can do for this sport, I think has been really exciting.

And to see it now, I'm like, wow, they've definitely stepped up their game. It's exciting to see people are paying attention to this now. People are able to watch this when they want, and I just think it's really cool and exciting to be a part of something like this. Because I've loved volleyball since I was 12 years old, and to be a part of something that's growing so much and to be able to share that with so many people, it's really an honor.

DEVYN ROBINSON: Yeah, I was here last year but I was working it with the mini mic, and now they have junior reporters, I think, and I think that is so cool to get young kids in here getting involved in volleyball.

I sat and talked with them for a little bit. They're a little shy obviously, but getting to talk to them be them be like, oh, am I going to see you later? Now they have someone to look up to and a reason to watch volleyball and tell their friends, and that's just a good thing for them to get involved in early, and I'm really excited for that.

Q. Which side of the mic did you like better?

DEVYN ROBINSON: I like talking into it, but I didn't mind holding the mini mic. It was cute.

Q. Kelly, how was your trip to the Olympics? What were some of the top moments of that trip?

KELLY SHEFFIELD: It's the first time I've ever been to the Olympics. First time I've ever had an Olympian, and we've got two there. It was cool. It was emotional. It was awesome. There were so many of their former teammates that also made the trip over.

It was incredible. We saw four indoor games, two on the women's, two on the men's. Three of those four went five sets. We saw USA Beach under the Eiffel Tower at night when the sunset was going and the glistening of the Eiffel Tower, and we saw a day of gymnastics where there wasn't a single American there, and it didn't really matter.

The pride and the joy that is just around for everybody, it was just such a great vibe. I'm fired up for it to get to Los Angeles in four years. Hopefully we'll have some players, but if not, I can guarantee you me and my family will be there.

Q. Sarah, you and Carter won silver with USA Volleyball in the Dominican Republic. What was that experience like, and what impressed you about Jess Mruzik's performance?

SARAH FRANKLIN: Yeah, I think going to USA and being able to play with a whole bunch of other college athletes who are just as driven, just as high level, who want the same thing I think is really an awesome experience.

And also to put a face and a personality behind the name that you play against every single time I think was just a really cool way to just get to play some more volleyball and get to play some more sixes, because that's always an awesome experience.

I think Jess was great when we were out there, and getting to learn from other outsiders, as well as Eva Hudson, getting to learn how they do things differently than maybe you do.

Because every outside, every position is going to do things a little differently because people have different skills. I think it was just really cool to get to talk with them about how we operate versus how they operate and how they kind of go into games and how they see things.

Because I see games as something that's very high level, I'm a high motor, and maybe Jess and Eva see it a little differently. So I thought it was really cool to get those different perspectives as well as represent USA. I'm just so honored to do that every time.

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