

Big Ten Volleyball Media Days

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

Oregon Ducks

Coach Matt Ulmer

Daley McClellan

Onye Ofoegbu

Press Conference



MATT ULMER: Just thank you for this whole experience. To be a part of the Big Ten but be a part of the media days yesterday and today, it's just really neat. Really neat to be a part of. Just to see how the sport has grown, to see how much the Big Ten cares about women's volleyball, and now just shining a spotlight on these amazing women, it's just really special.

I know we're really thankful for being a part of it. Thank you to Oregon for giving us the chance.

Looking forward to this year. It's going to be a year of a lot of firsts but there's no better group that I'd rather do this with than the group that we have.

Q. You're replacing a lot of senior talent that's graduated, so for Coach, what's your methodology with the younger players? And for the athletes, how has it been incorporating new teammates?

MATT ULMER: Yeah, we graduated seven, and all seven of them got pro contracts. They're all going pro right now. That's amazing. I think what that did is it showed the group how we do things.

If you put your time in and you work hard and you go through this process, the highs and lows of it, you're going to be rewarded with -- generally what they came here with the goal is to be able to play at the next level, and I think they see a path for that. It's tangible for them.

There's a group that was on the other side all last season that was winning a lot of the time, and they were champing at the bit ready to go.

I think that group is now ready for their time. I think Daley and Mimi coming back, having an expanded role, Onye was over there kicking the other side's butt all last year; now she's ready to do that to some other teams, which I

think is kind of her -- but this group, they're ready to go, and it's going to be a fun roster.

DALEY McCLELLAN: It's been really fun to incorporate the new freshmen and the transfers. I'm just really excited for all of us to mesh together for preseason. There's a lot of different skill, lots of different personalities. There's good leadership personalities, and we're just really excited to pull that together for the season.

ONYE OFOEGBU: I'd say we get along really, really well, which is going to be key for us this season as we're working together and working on what we need to do to prepare for the season, so it's exciting to see everyone meshing well together.

Q. Matt, when you've talked to recruits, what do you tell them about what being in the Big Ten is going to mean going forward for the program?

MATT ULMER: Well, we've really only known this recruiting cycle. We're actually having more and more recruits coming from the Midwest and coming from all over, so I think they're pretty excited with the opportunity to go play in front of their home crowds more, so I think that was a bonus for them.

I think everybody knows it's been the Pac-12 and Big Ten for volleyball for as long as it's been going, and now with this change, it's obviously Big Ten is No. 1 by a mile in our sport.

People that come to Oregon, they come to Oregon because they want to compete for championships. They want to have a future in volleyball beyond the school. They want to get a great education, and they want to see not only our country but the world, and these are things they're going to be able to do at Oregon; the Big Ten only adds to that.

Q. Matt, you mentioned the season of firsts and so many firsts coming. What firsts are you most looking forward to and what kind of challenges does that bring?



DALEY McCLELLAN: I think we're just super excited to introduce ourselves. Our whole culture, our whole -- what we want people to see when they play us. We're just very excited for our first year in Big Ten, and the competition obviously is going to be super, super high level. So we're just very excited for our first year.

MATT ULMER: I would say from a volleyball standpoint, anytime we actually go to Nebraska or we go to Minnesota and we go to these places -- we played Wisconsin this past regionals, a lot of the fans, they'll come back and they'll say you guys play such a certain way. Generally it's fast with the defense or just an exciting brand of volleyball.

I'm going to echo Daley. I'm very excited for everybody to see how Oregon plays volleyball. I think it's a little bit different than everyone else, and hopefully it's a show they appreciate and they like watching.

ONYE OFOEGBU: Yeah, I'd agree. Not only is Oregon volleyball a little bit different, but we also have a different team this year, so I'm excited to show the world what our team is looking like this year.

Q. Just wondering how much adjusting playing style you guys going into the Big Ten and them also adjusting to you, how much will that take place on both sides?

MATT ULMER: I could have told you what all the Pac-12 teams were going to be like when we played them. The scouting report didn't really have to different because I already kind of had it. I'd kind of copy and paste just with different names. Throw those out now and learn a bunch of new ways.

Again, playing Wisconsin at the end, they played differently than any other team we played, style of play, slower set, higher above our block, the shots, options that they had, just the physicality that they had from all pins. That was something that we had not seen, probably since 2018 when we lost to Nebraska to go to the Final Four, and they had Mikaela Foecke among others.

So there is definitely some adjustments that are going to be made on the volleyball court. For us, there's some things that they probably don't even understand or that I've even explained to them why we were doing it in the spring from a defensive standpoint, but because I knew we were going to need to be prepared, play some better off blocker defense deeper against a hard driven ball.

For example, when you're playing Franklin, that we weren't getting from other teams that we're playing. There's going to be different pieces we're going to have to adjust to, and

hopefully I started that in the spring.

Q. Just to follow up on the multiple styles of volleyball you mentioned, when you take both East Coast and West Coast together and you have the excitement that Nebraska and a lot of other Big Ten teams helped build across the sport in general, how do you see the two styles of volleyball coming together to push that momentum further in volleyball?

MATT ULMER: Yeah, I just think there's a lot of matchups we don't normally see. Again, I think the Wisconsin fans were really excited to watch Oregon play Wisconsin in the Fieldhouse in December. I really do. I think they were really looking forward to that matchup, hoping that it would happen, not that they weren't cheering for Purdue in the round before, but I think they were excited for that.

Again, I think that's where our sport is going, is people are starting to understand how different styles are and they would like to see those matchups. Now all of a sudden I think you're going to get some of those fantasy matchups coming in, and we're going to get them regularly.

Again, for the growth of the sport I think you're going to get a lot of really great matchups. I don't think Nebraska has ever played -- I remember they came to Oregon but we didn't play them when they came in 2017 or '16 or something like that. But Nebraska has now played against us in Eugene. Our fans get to see that for the first time, among others.

I think as our sport grows on the west, the Pacific Northwest, they're going to get a treat to get some of these great matchups.

Q. For all those back in Eugene who may not know the level of volleyball the Big Ten provides -- you mentioned it was a mile ahead. Why is it a mile ahead and what can fans expect from the level of competition this season?

MATT ULMER: What did I say? A mile ahead of what?

Q. Just repeating the question. What can they expect from the Big Ten?

MATT ULMER: Yeah, I think the physicality that I was speaking of. Again, just a high level of recruiting in the conference. We had -- Stanford would do that for us in the PAC where we would see them consistently.

But I would say overall there's multiple teams in this conference now that really are recruiting the highest level athletes. So that's something that we're going to hopefully



be able to adjust to quickly. And again, I just think for us it was -- I think it was really important that we played Wisconsin at the end of last year, because I think it was something that this group needed to be able to see what this really was like, especially in the Fieldhouse.

The crowds are going to be different for us. And our crowd is growing. We're top 10 in the country last year in attendance which is a great thing for Oregon volleyball. But going into Nebraska, going into Wisconsin, going to Minnesota, we're not going to Purdue this year, but I'm excited for that one.

Some of these different gyms where the crowds are just really intense and all over us, hopefully that's something that our group is going to find very exciting.

The fans in Oregon will see that and hopefully we get a little competitive within our fan base.

Q. As I was watching that regional last year, I was like, this is going to be it going forward. But my question for you is with the House settlement and revenue sharing and roster scholarships, how does that change your role at all, if it does, developing this program and moving it forward with different whatever you want to call it?

MATT ULMER: Yeah, for me at least it doesn't do anything for me right now. We'll see where all that goes. I know we're all patiently waiting to see what's going to come from all that and how that'll play out in each school.

What I really appreciate about Oregon, there's a lot of things, but one of them is how much they appreciate female student-athletes and how much they prop up our women.

So I know they will be well taken care of whenever whatever happens and that the sport of volleyball is growing, is shining bright.

I think things are going to be just fine in Eugene, Oregon, moving forward and that our team is set up really well for the future.

Q. You played in a very unique gym, Matthew Knight Arena. What do you love about that and what are you excited about showing to the Big Ten conference about your arena and your court?

MATT ULMER: So we're actually changing our court this year. I know there's a lot of fans around the world that are going to be really sad about that, but we're not going to have the trees on the floor anymore for volleyball. We're

going to have TeraFlex.

I tried to get TeraFlex to mimic our exact court but they weren't able to do that quite yet. Maybe next year we'll get the trees on the TeraFlex. So all those streamers out there I know they're going to be really sad. We're excited about having TeraFlex, the team is excited about it. That's going to be a good for us.

I think more so than just the court is the environment. Again, our student section is really growing. The pit crew is growing. The excitement level in Eugene for women's volleyball, it's really neat to see over -- this will be my eighth season as head coach -- to see the growth there.

We just broke our season ticket record last year. We've already broken that again this year. Things are really growing. Our student-athletes are really being noticed, applauded, and encouraged. And I think the gym environment is loud, and they're not just sitting on their hands. They're engaged, and I think it's an environment that will be really enjoyable for other teams to come in.

Q. Coach, the three setters on your roster don't have any assists for Oregon. How key will that position battle be for the team, and what have you seen and what are you expecting going into the fall?

MATT ULMER: We will need that to change to be successful. We're going to need some assists. Cris Cline redshirted last year behind Hanna Pukas. Hanna was a First-Team All-American. But what an opportunity for Cris to be able to learn from Hanna and to compete against her on the other side.

I think Cris grew more than maybe anybody I've ever coaxed in the spring. I thought huge adjustments in her game, so I think she's ready to go.

Again, one of those players that was just sitting waiting their time, waiting for their turn, so I think she's ready to go. Roberta and Evelina I have not seen in person, so I don't know. We'll see. But they've had a lot of success in their countries.

Robey was the national junior college Player of the Year and two time All-American they won and I think she's probably the real deal. I think the battle between the three of them hopefully will only elevate the style of play in our gym.

Q. There's been a lot of conversation about travel, especially for you West Coasters. Besides charter flights, what steps are you taking to stay successful both in the classroom and mentally and physically, as

well?

MATT ULMER: I actually -- something that I was nervous about was the schedule, to see what it would look like. Yeah, that's out of our control, right? But I really applaud the conference. I think they were creative and they came up with really nice solutions where we have home matches during the week and -- at four weeks we have a home match during the week, but then on the weekend we travel.

So I actually think we will miss less class this year from what I calculated than what we did in the PAC. Again, appreciate their efforts knowing this was an important issue. I think they really took the great lead and made some great choices for us.

I think our student-athletes will be just fine and taken care of. But we always have academic support for them in everything they're doing, and if they ever need anything, all they have to do is ask, as long as it's legal.

Q. Coming in with Mimi you've seen her grow since her freshman year and how has she helped you grow and prepare for your bigger role this year?

DALEY McCLELLAN: Mimi has grown so much from her freshman year. She wasn't very comfortable serve receiving, and at first she didn't have a lot of confidence going into her freshman year, but as the years have gone on I've seen her improve so much with her passing, her defense.

It has just been really fun to watch. It's also motivated me, as well. It's been so fun to see that in her.

Q. Onye, Oregon has had the most depth at the middle positions. How has the confidence at your position even in practice last season prepared you for this season and what are some things you learned from Kara and Karson?

ONYE OFOEGBU: Kara and Karson both just showed me how important it is to be resilient in your position. I would say it's a little bit of pressure as a middle blocker to kind of make sure you're aware of the game, so I learned a lot of that from them, and they showed me that it can be easier if you just take the steps and really work for it. So I'm excited about that.

Q. Coach, I heard that you said a record with 29 wins in 2023. Do you think you will surpass that record this upcoming season?

MATT ULMER: That's a good question. I think that's a question for them. I think we have a team that can do that.

But we never really focus on the wins and losses. We really focus on the process.

Every day, and this is a good day for us, they get to hear their voices, they get to start to think about things they want to bring back to the team. This is a good start for our season that will give us more chance to be successful and maybe break those records.

But when we had those 29 wins we never talked about it. We just talked about doing our job every day, trying to get better, be the best version of ourselves, and those things will take care of themselves. Good question, thank you.

Q. Onye, how was the process transferring to Oregon after playing three seasons at UC?

ONYE OFOEGBU: I would say the process was pretty quick -- or maybe not as quick as some people's. But I would say for me it was easier because I knew Matt already and met him when I was 11 years old. I felt pretty comfortable deciding to move to a different state, especially because I was born and raised in California, so I lived in California my whole life. For me it was a big move to go one state over.

I felt more comfortable already knowing Matt, and yeah, that factored a lot in my decision.

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