

Big Ten Volleyball Media Days

Tuesday, August 6, 2024

Chicago, Illinois, USA

Washington Huskies

Coach Leslie Gabriel

Emoni Bush

Madi Endsley

Press Conference



LESLIE GABRIEL: First I want to just thank the Big Ten conference, the Big Ten Network, for putting on this Media Day event. It's not only great for our players and program but also for our sport. Thank you to all the media that are here today. You make this experience a special one for our players.

Finally, I want to thank my SWA Kim Durand and our assistant director of media relations Michael Bruscas, and also Josie, our media person, for joining us today for our event.

Today is an exciting day for us, as it marks a new era in volleyball as we enter our first year into the Big Ten. It is an honor to be a part of this great conference. I believe that the Big Ten is one of the best volleyball conferences in the country. It's filled top to bottom with some of the best teams, coaches, and players in the country.

The other exciting thing is the fan support that each institution has for volleyball. We are excited again to be in the Big Ten and can't wait to get started.

Washington volleyball has been one of the top programs in this century, winning both Pac-10, Pac-12 titles, reaching Final Fours, and winning a National Championship. We are a program that strives to win conference and National Championships each year.

As we transition to this new conference and take on this new challenge, we're going to have to raise our level of play while staying true to who we are as a program.

Last season we didn't achieve what we wanted to achieve. With a small roster hit with injuries throughout the season, we were unable to compete like we wanted. In a season filled with such adversity, the thing that I appreciated the most from the players and staff was the sense of resiliency and grit they showed throughout the season. Each day the

players showed up ready to compete.

Looking to this year we are excited about the depth of our roster, returning most of our starting lineup from last year, the return of Emoni Bush, and with the additions of three transfers and a freshman class that was ranked 10th in the country, we're excited to get in the gym as a full team and get to work.

Today I have Madi Endsley and Emoni Bush. Both players are established pin attackers who have played major roles and carried big loads for our team during their time here at UW. They are smart, competitive, hardworking women that are great leaders in our program and for the young women in our community.

And with that, we're happy to take any questions.

Q. Emoni, I wanted to ask about your experience playing with the Canadian National Team this summer. What are some takeaways you're looking forward to bringing back to Washington and how has that made you think about your playing career after college?

EMONI BUSH: It was a really amazing experience getting to compete at the highest level. We went to Norceca Final Six in the Dominican Republic, competed against some really gnarly teams.

But more so personally, I just went into the off-season with the mindset of I'm going to get my footing back with volleyball. I'm going to get all my skills back and I'm going to get better at my skills, which I feel like I accomplished.

Just kind of establishing myself as a six rotation hitter, I worked on that a lot for the summer, along with great coaches and great teammates. I feel like I made big strides.

Q. Coach, you mentioned that you didn't achieve your goals last year but you got a couple new freshmen in, highly touted. How do you expect them to contribute out of the gates?

LESLIE GABRIEL: Yeah, one of the things that were



important to us as a staff was that we bring in a lot of players going into this season so that we have depth, and we're excited about the new players that we have.

We have three transfers coming in mixed with three freshmen like you mentioned. What I'm looking forward to the most is just who will rise when competition happens.

I think everyone on our roster is able to compete and earn a spot, so let's get in there and compete and see what happens.

Q. I was just wondering what y'all have done during the off-season to prepare for the travel demands of switching conferences, playing in kind of a coast-to-coast league like this one.

LESLIE GABRIEL: Yeah, I've been able to sit down with our administration and with my staff and figure out what's the best way for us to travel; when is the best time; is it best to fly commercial; is it best to charter.

Our department and our staff, we put a lot of time and thought into that. So there's been a lot of really good decisions to do that so that we get to the places that we need to and the girls can be well-rested to compete.

EMONI BUSH: As players we don't have much control over it. We've just got to go with the flow. I feel like we've just kind of focused on being present, taking the moment as it comes, staying focused on the volleyball side.

We don't have control over our travel, where we stay, what time we leave. We're just going to take it one day at a time and try and stay on top of our schoolwork and stay focused on volleyball.

MADI ENDSLEY: Yeah, I think the big thing for us is staying positive through adversity especially with things we can't control, like the traveling and our schedule and all that stuff.

But I think that we made big strides over the last couple training blocks, and I'm excited to see how we do.

Q. Madi, you carried a very heavy load last year. What does it mean to have Emoni back and healthy and how is that going to change your role with the team this year?

MADI ENDSLEY: Yeah, it means the world to me. I kind of knew what she was going through last year because I had kind of similar happen to me the season before. Just to see her come back so fast and to see her killing it on Team Canada is just like, ugh, makes me emotional a little

bit I'm just so excited for her and I can't wait to see what she does this season.

Q. We talked about the travel possibility, but what gyms are you looking forward to playing for the first time?

MADI ENDSLEY: Realistically all of them. I can't wait to see all the gyms. But the big one that I'm looking forward to is at Wisconsin. We played there in the tournament I think two seasons ago. We didn't play Wisconsin, but we played in the gym, and I can't wait to do it with Wisconsin across the net.

EMONI BUSH: Mine is Penn State. I feel like I've been hearing about this energy, this crazy gym, and I just can't wait to get there and experience it.

Q. One of the things that Matt said from Oregon is that his calculations are that at least his athletes will be in class more than the Pac-12 schedule had. Have you calculated that and found something similar?

LESLIE GABRIEL: You know, that's a good question. I know that that has been something that's looked at. I don't know the exact answer for that to give you at this time.

Q. Obviously Keegan was at Washington for a little while. What advice has he given you about the transition or about the travel, or is there anything comparable or is he just being quiet because he's a competitor now?

LESLIE GABRIEL: No, we're still friends. Obviously we had a great working relationship and we've been able to remain friends after. He just talks about how great this conference is and how much they support volleyball and how the network really wants volleyball to succeed and get them out in the forefront.

After going through this, everything he said is right. The Big Ten, you guys do it right here. It just makes it exciting for me as a coach to be able to showcase the players in our gym who work so hard. They deserve all this that you guys work hard to get for them. We're greatly honored and are excited to be a part of this conference.

Q. For the players, what is the one song that gets you hyped up for a big game, before a big one?

MADI ENDSLEY: I said this earlier, but "DNA" by Kendrick Lamar.

EMONI BUSH: Mine right now is "My House" by Beyoncé, but me and Madi have this little duo song from The D to the

A that I feel like is played before every single match.

Q. Have you ever had any other injuries other than your shoulder injury?

EMONI BUSH: I feel like every other volleyball player, I've rolled my ankles more times than I can count. But other than that, my shoulder was the first big injury.

MADI ENDSLEY: Yeah, I hurt my ankle and had ankle surgery two seasons ago, and that's the only big one I've had.

Q. When y'all get drafted and play for different teams and it comes to the point to where you have to play up against each other, how would y'all feel?

EMONI BUSH: I'd feel excited. Madi is just a competitor and she makes you bring it. If I ever see her across the net, I'm going to have to bring it. I think it would be a good competitive game.

MADI ENDSLEY: I was going to say ecstatic because the fact that we're both playing pro volleyball is insane considering that we came in as freshmen together. I would just be stoked to be there to be honest with you, playing against Emoni Bush.

Q. There's a lot of uncertainty on the horizon, especially with the House settlement. Are you having conversations with the administration about what the future could look like, and how do you deal with the uncertainty of what lies ahead for volleyball?

LESLIE GABRIEL: Yeah, we're in exciting times. We're having conversations of being able to pay student-athletes. Our administration is staying on top of it and keeping us educated as we continue to move forward.

They're willing to make sure that we're supported in a way where we can compete with all the best schools out there.

Q. There's been discussions about styles of play between the former Pac-12 schools and the Midwestern Big Ten schools. I wanted to ask what you think your style of play is and what can people expect to see this season as you take on some of those really physical teams?

EMONI BUSH: Yeah, historically Washington has been a really strong serving and blocking team. Those have kind of been the pillars of our program.

But I feel like more specifically this next season you can see a group of girls that are ready to get after it, that will go

hard and give it their all every single point, no matter if we win or lose the point.

MADI ENDSLEY: Yeah, I agree. I think areas like defense are going to be a big deal for us, considering the Big Ten is so good at it and makes it hard for us to score. We're going to have to figure out offensive shots that are going to work against these better defensive teams.

But Emoni summed it up pretty good.

Q. A lot of new rule changes coming this year. What are your thoughts on the double contact rule? And coach, the two liberos, are you planning to utilize that or how to integrate that into the system?

LESLIE GABRIEL: Yeah, we're definitely looking at the two libero. It just will depend on what our needs are for the team, and if that is something that we need that will help us. It's definitely something that we're considering and that we'll look at.

EMONI BUSH: As far as the double rule, I am so thankful. Thank you. Probably like the worst hands ever, so that rule is definitely one of my favorite. I don't know, as an outside I don't really do much of it. So yeah.

MADI ENDSLEY: Yeah, I think the double rule will just make, I don't know, passes that are way off the net, off the court, like shooting outside, should make the game more elite.

I'm excited to see what it's going to look like and how it's going to play into the game, like how far into doubles we allowed to do, like kind of hit it twice, or...

So I'm excited to see that stuff.

Q. You've been through this series of speed dating sessions today. I'm curious what was your favorite room, favorite question, favorite reaction throughout your first Big Ten media days?

EMONI BUSH: My favorite was the digital room with Emily. Me and Madi got to play a bunch of games and just have fun. It was one of the ones where it felt like there was no pressure. It didn't feel like there was a camera in there staring at me. It was one of the more fun ones today.

MADI ENDSLEY: Yeah, I liked the studio. It was just really cool to see that setup and see how everything works from behind the scenes.

Q. Yours was the media room, of course, Coach?

LESLIE GABRIEL: Yeah, the press conference was my favorite.

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