

# Pac-12 Conference Women's Basketball Media Day

Tuesday, October 10, 2023

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

**Oregon State Beavers**

**Scott Rueck**

**Raegan Beers**

**Timea Gardiner**



**Q. Head coach Scott Rueck entering year number 14 at your alma mater, which is wild. You're not old enough to have coached 14 years.**

SCOTT RUECK: Thank you.

**Q. Seven returners from last year's squad. Excited to talk to Raegan Beers and Timea Gardiner, who you brought in today. But you tell me, big picture, state of the program, how you're feeling about this unit as you tip-off year 14.**

SCOTT RUECK: I'm excited. We had so much momentum built, I think eight years in the tournament, and then COVID happened. We took a step back, no question. Now this group is re-establishing the culture that we had, and they're competitors like we've had, and their expectations are what we've done.

Because of that, I'm extremely optimistic. I love them. I think we have all the pieces that make a great team. We need to grow together. Seven returners, six new. But the new, three of them are transfers, two of them have Pac-12 experience, and the freshmen are leaning on some experience in Italy as well as dynamic experiences in their own careers to this point that I think have advanced them and prepared them for what's to come so that we'll be ready sooner than later.

So I'm loving everything I'm seeing and experiencing. They're great.

**Q. You mentioned Italy. Again, we talked to Kelly about this, those ten days that you got with this group before you went on that trip, what did that do, and what did the Italy experience do to propel you forward into practice?**

SCOTT RUECK: I think what happens in those

experiences, I think you just learn so much about each other. So the things that I didn't know about each of them, I was able just to observe. Who cares how well we played. I wanted them to play hard, but I got to know them, and they got to know me and our staff.

So the communication, the barriers are gone. It's like we get each other. It just advanced us so quickly, and we had so much success. We played really well, and we played extremely hard, which made us all really excited.

**Q. What was that momentum that was lost for those couple of years? You talked about rebuilding culture. I'm curious, did you think that any of that culture was lost as well, or do you just think it was -- you know, it was the momentum, the stops and the starts, the injuries, and all of the things that came with that difficult period of time?**

SCOTT RUECK: It was so challenging. We are built off relationships. That's what our program is. It's outward focus. It is -- there's a warmth that we operate with. That's how I know how to coach. It's what my entire career is built. It's 14 here, but it was 14 at George Fox before that. So 28 years now going into this year.

Everything has been built off relationships, and to have all of that stripped away during the pandemic -- we lost a couple staff members during it. We had so much transition. We had transfers really for the first time, in number anyway, and that hurt us. It did set us back.

Now it's just okay, rebuild. So I felt like that was like an injury. I felt like we had an injury and we're rehabbing, and we're going through these trials and tribulations again to find our way and to remember who we are as a program.

What we experienced last year -- we did a lot of good things the last couple years, even though we didn't win at the same level. Last year this group showed so much perseverance. Timea and Rae, who are here today, were a big part of that. Obviously Talia was a big part that have and A.J. a huge part of that, in just keeping the group together and playing our best basketball down the stretch of the season. We beat Arizona and USC in the last two

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weeks of the year for us.

That created momentum going into this year, and that galvanized this group. They're here to do something special. You'll hear that when they're up here, but that's evident to me as well. So it just feels like we're back. We're back. We're running again.

**Q. The challenge on the floor with Talia and Timea, who aren't 100 percent -- and Timea who couldn't get on the court because of what had happened during the preseason. But it's not just that. It's the inability to tell people this is why they're not playing. So then you're dealing with all that stuff too. How much did that impact your team, and how does it feel to sort of be rid of it?**

SCOTT RUECK: Yeah, clarity and transparency is always good. Timea's situation was so unique, and just out of privacy, we weren't able to talk about that.

Then Talia managing injury all year. I mean, we all knew she was, and bless her heart, she battled through it the entire season. Then it just got to a point where it was too much. So it made sense for her to do what she did and step away at the very end -- I mean, step off the court at the very end. So now she's back 100 percent.

Timea was incredible in her rehab process last year and her countenance. I mean, she weathered massive adversity as well as anybody I've ever seen. She was sitting on the sidelines during practices where she could have been off sulking on the side and just stayed engaged.

But she missed three months of reps. When she came back, this conference is so good and it hit so fast, those reps mattered. So she wasn't as impactful as she would have been of course. Now she's had an entire off-season.

So those two, along with everybody else, being healthy, it just feels right, and it's exciting.

**Q. I think, Timea in particular, it's interesting when you look at players who lose time on the court, and a lot of them, you can go different ways. I think it's hard because there's a loneliness that comes with the rehab, there's being away from the team and not being able to do the thing that you love. How did you see Timea be able to weather that storm, and what was it she was able to do to stay engaged and be as ready as she could when her time was ready?**

SCOTT RUECK: She was just normal, and it worried me. I kept asking her, are you really okay? You seem so normal. It seems like you would have to try to be as

normal as you're being, but it was just her. I would say where are you dealing with all of the hard things? She goes, well, with my mom and dad and then on my own.

Every day as a pro, she's a pro, she came in and operated like a professional from day one and just brought her A-game every day even though she's going through that adversity. So she demonstrated leadership and demonstrated an incredible example to all of us during that stretch.

Then to come in and get Freshman of the Week her first weekend of playing college basketball.

**Q. I did those games. She was pretty good.**

SCOTT RUECK: It was insane. She earned that by preparing herself in every way. To her and her family and our team for supporting her, I give them just tons of credit. It was amazing.

**Q. Preseason polls don't mean anything, but they do mean something at the same time. When you look at the coaches and the media vote you 9th and 10th in the conference and you've got the people coming back that you have, do you use that to say let's -- we're not going to surprise people because we know what we can do. What's your approach with that?**

SCOTT RUECK: I haven't seen that yet. So you just told me.

**Q. Sorry about that.**

SCOTT RUECK: It makes sense, I guess. This conference is so good. We have so many veterans walking around today. I thought you graduated three years ago. What are you doing here?

Anyway, the conference is loaded. With this group, though, I'm optimistic, but it doesn't make sense to put us a whole lot higher probably based on last year, and we are unproven at certain positions.

I know what this team will do with that, though, and that's exciting too.

**Q. Raegan Beers, who you brought with her today, she was so exciting to watch last year, Freshman of the Year, Sixth Player of the Year. What steps has she taken, and what are you excited she'll be able to bring her sophomore season?**

SCOTT RUECK: I think she's just adapting. Your freshman year, you're leaning on everything that got you

here, and what got her here is power and quickness and position. Nobody gets a deep post pin better or quicker than Raegan Beers.

Her parents did such a great job and her coaches instilling that in her. I watched her as a sophomore, like I wish I could get my post to post like that, that quickly and efficiently. So all of those things. Defense always is a journey. So I think that's notched forward.

I think we got into some matchups last year where she was matched physically and struggled because of it, because of her game that she has relied on forever didn't work next level. So she has adapted and now really developed her game away from the basket.

I'd say, if I could use the term, it would be a more finesse game to go with the power, and it's a perfect complement. She's been remarkable in how hard she's worked this offseason. We saw it in Italy, and we're seeing it every day.

**Q. One freshman in particular, Donovan Hunter, I know you're extremely excited about it. We've been hearing about it, reading about it for a couple years now. What does she bring to your team?**

SCOTT RUECK: Leadership at the point guard position. She's a defensive stopper. She identifies as a defender. Incredible floor vision, I should say. Then she's been shooting the ball incredibly well lately in practice.

I just see a first class competitor and somebody you can just rely on no matter the circumstances that has a countenance that is unwavering. She's just the same every minute. And a mistake happens, and sometimes that impacts a young player in particular. With her, it doesn't. It's next play. It's literally this, eh, okay, next play.

That just sends such a cool, great message to her teammates and everybody. Next play. Let's go. So she's doing everything right. She's an exciting player.

**Q. As you were saying that, the two players you brought with you were nodding their head yes, she's shooting the ball. Your oldest son Cole is a golfer at Boise state. He's actually in Corvallis right now. Is that true?**

SCOTT RUECK: Yes, today is a little tough for me. I'm here. My son is playing at Trysting Tree in Oregon State's tournament today representing Boise State. When I took the stage, he was 3-under through seven holes today. Yesterday wasn't his best day. I got to be out there with him a little bit. Today he's responding very well.

**Q. Maybe he's loosening up now that dad's off his back (laughter).**

SCOTT RUECK: I think there's probably something to that actually. It's tough to be a golf parent. Anybody that's out there that's been one knows it's a bit of torture and it's a dance we do. I'm so proud of him.

THE MODERATOR: Wish him the best of luck and wish you the best of luck this season.

As we bring up your players right now, Raegan Beers, come on up. Timea Gardiner.

**Q. I was just laughing because I'm watching you guys out of the corner of my eyes talking about Donovan, and you guys are nodding and smiling. Tell us how this team is coming together. Donovan or whoever you want to talk about that's really made an impact so far.**

RAEGAN BEERS: We were nodding because we were agreeing with coach. He was talking about Donovan Hunter, and her motto right now is just, Bro, it's not that deep. That's truly how she plays.

**Q. Can you explain that motto? She really has a motto?**

RAEGAN BEERS: Yes. We just got back from our team retreat, and we had to pick a quote as we got to know each other better. Her quote was, Bro, it's not that deep. I believe she has a shirt that has that and her dad has a shirt that has it.

That just shows the maturity she has of next play, next play. You can't decide what's going to happen in the past. It's over. It's done. You can't argue with the refs because that's what they called. You've just got to move on. She is the essence of maturity, especially as a freshman. It's exciting to see her grow.

And the rest of the pieces, Dom and Kennedie, who are also freshmen, both of them are beyond explosive. Their first step is incredible. I think Dom is going to shoot it every time, and then she drives right by me.

So just them learning and growing and then us being there to help them with our experience that we have last year is beyond exciting. We're excited for all the different pieces that we have this year for sure.

**Q. Timea, talk about a year ago, you're so excited about being a freshman and jumping in. There was a**

**story about what happened and just your trials and tribulations getting back on the floor. Share whatever you want about that experience.**

TIMEA GARDINER: Yeah, it was very difficult, and watching -- well, coming in with the expectation of coming in with Raegan, and we're super excited. We're like, yes, we're going to be really good. Then all of a sudden it happens.

Stuff happens, and it's not what happens to you, it's just how you respond to it. So I just learned a different perspective of just be grateful for what you have and to be outwardly focused as much as you can.

**Q. I love what Coach was saying about just how normal you were. I know that sounds weird to say, but just you approached it so well and you were able to stay so even. How did you have that mindset?**

TIMEA GARDINER: Yeah, consistently being outwardly focused, just being positive, putting on a bright face for my teammates every single day. Being the players' coach, seeing things on the court. Talking to Raegan or Talia like, hey, this is not working. I guess just kind of being the eyes for them and stepping into that leadership role of being the vocal leader.

**Q. What's it like being on the floor together? I did a number of your games, and you'd be out in the corner and you'd be in the high post -- it was just like you guys are hard to track, hard to match up with, and hard to stop. What's it like when you're playing with each other?**

TIMEA GARDINER: Yeah, it's fun.

**Q. I bet it is.**

TIMEA GARDINER: I love playing with Raegan. It was kind of an adjustment with two powerful posts trying to figure out playing with each other. This year we're figuring it out, and it's going to be super fun.

RAEGAN BEERS: Just to piggy-back off of that, it was interesting because I don't feel -- and I think Timea just said it. We saw Timea at the end of the season, but she never really reached her peak. What she's doing now in practice just shows that jumping into the middle of Pac-12 is the hardest thing to do. Then winning Pac-12 Freshman of the Week your first two games is incredible.

So what we're seeing from her now and just the way we're adapting and playing with each other, and the high post passing, that's always a challenge when you're playing with

scout guys that just love to tip the ball from behind you. So just figuring that out has been really fun and really exciting just to see how we're going to be so much better and just working together this year for sure.

**Q. Coach was talking about putting this program's culture back together after a difficult couple of years, obviously coming off of COVID and injuries and your situation, Timea. How are you guys doing that, and how much did your overseas trip sort of help you in terms of establishing culture and chemistry with this team?**

RAEGAN BEERS: Coach already touched on it, but our culture and our team is very centered on relationships. If our relationships are good, we tend to play good. If we're on the same page with one another off the court, we're going to be on the same page on the court.

So Italy really helped just getting to know each other in that respect and learning how each other plays. Obviously we had our first three games there. So learning how each other plays and what works when they're on the court and what doesn't, trying to figure that out and we're continuing to figure out that these days in practice as well.

Italy was really helpful with that. We're kind of rebuilding a culture, in a way, like Coach said, but it's always going to be centered on our relationships. It's always been that way, and that hasn't changed. So continuing those relationships and strengthening those is going to be super important.

TIMEA GARDINER: To piggy-back off of that, I feel as though -- last year we were a young team with several transfers and five new freshmen. So it's a lot of -- I mean, Bendu Yeane had the experience. Shalexus Aaron, as well. But five new freshmen thrown to the wolves, it's a big jump from high school.

This year we know what it takes to be a competitive team in the Pac-12, and we're just excited because we have all the pieces.

**Q. Just a quick little personal question. Both of you come from Pac-12 states, Colorado and Utah, and are entering your sophomore years, but just how important was it for you to play competitive ball close to home?**

TIMEA GARDINER: I'm super excited to be able to travel to Salt Lake this year. Last year we were fortunate enough to play them at home in a packed arena. It's amazing to play in front of them. But playing in front of our hometowns is extremely special.



RAEGAN BEERS: I second that. It's super fun. Part of the reason that we love the Pac-12 is that we get to go home and play in front of the people that we grew up around and the people that raised us. We are beyond excited to go back to our hometowns this year and play them and compete there.

**Q. And you went to Valor Christian. I went to Mullen High School, not too far. Valor Christian wasn't around when I went to high school.**

RAEGAN BEERS: We beat you all the time.

**Q. It's true. You do. It's not much of a rivalry. Also where Christian McCaffery went to high school, Valor Christian. That must be kind of cool to watch. I know you guys didn't overlap.**

RAEGAN BEERS: McCafferys, we know them actually. My brothers played football, so my older brother played with one of the McCafferys, Luke, for a year. So we kind of know their family a little bit.

**Q. Love it. You've got two brothers that are now at FIU?**

RAEGAN BEERS: Yeah, Florida International.

**Q. Did they teach you a thing or two about being able to get in the post and do some work?**

RAEGAN BEERS: Yes. When I tend to post-up or a get a little too aggressive or my elbows find a way to have a mind of their own, that's on my brothers because I had to hold my own, especially I used to always be bigger than them and then they had their growth spurts and that was not the case. They're both 6'5" and however big. So I had to hold my own and learn how to do it.

It kind of corresponds to being on the court and going against these really good, really versatile post players in the Pac-12. Shout out Rowdy and Rocky for helping me play in the post in the Pac-12.

**Q. Elbows have a mind of their own. You should use that with the officials and see if that works.**

RAEGAN BEERS: I don't know what they're doing. I have no control.

TIMEA GARDINER: I can attest to that in practice for sure.

**Q. You're picked ninth and tenth in media and coaches polls. What's it do you to you when you hear**

**those numbers?**

TIMEA GARDINER: I mean, rankings, they don't mean much, but they do. I feel last year was an adjustment for everyone on our team, but I feel this year we're ready to go and we're ready to exceed expectations.

RAEGAN BEERS: I second that. Regardless of where we're ranked -- and I feel like this goes all across the Pac-12 -- regardless of the rankings, the things in practice and the culture of our team isn't going to change. We're going to work hard and push each other and push ourselves to be the best that we can be.

Of course the rankings mean something, but we'll do our best to stay that way.

**Q. Raegan, you talked about defending Talia full court to up your defense last year. What new tools are in your toolbox this year?**

RAEGAN BEERS: Like Coach just said, I'm kind of adjusting. I'm trying to make my game a little more out now. That way, when I do play really good, bigger players that are talented, like Vonleh from Colorado, I have different tools to help me do that.

So just working on my game outside, working on my dribbling skills and working on my shot outside, and of course having people here who can adjust to that. Then Timea, who I feel like can hit every shot, I watch her do that. I'm like, okay, I got this. If Timea can do that, I think I can hit a little 15-footer. So just having that there has been helpful as well.

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