

# Big Ten Volleyball Media Days

Monday, July 28, 2025

Chicago, Illinois, USA

**Maryland Terrapins**

**Coach Adam Hughes**

**Ajack Malual**

**Eva Rohrbach**

Press Conference



AJACK MALUAL: That was a long time ago. It was kind of like 2018. It has been the peak of my time when I was playing in Italy. I was still in high school. I felt like it made me grow so much as a player, both on and off the court, and I feel like it gave me such a different perspective of what Italian volleyball style kind of looks like.

We got to face different countries, and so it was a little bit of an introduction to what it was coming in America and playing college volleyball.

**Q. Coach, I wanted to ask you about losing the production of Sam Csire and Samantha Schnitta, two leaders on this team, and what you're seeing from this squad in terms of refilling that production and the roles that they had.**

ADAM HUGHES: Yeah, we have a great balance of what the program and what the team looks like right now. Eva is one of our vets. She's been with us. She's been committed to us for a long time. She's had two good years and we're hoping she can take a huge step this year and have a great season.

We have a great core coming back. Last year we had five super seniors and three regular seniors. We had eight departures and we rolled the dice with those guys hoping we could capitalize on having three good seasons in a row.

Last year wasn't a good year for us, and we're trying to be resilient and bounce back. But I think the staff and the program as a whole did a really good job of making sure we found the right pieces, the things that we needed to replace in this off-season.

We're not trying to buy time and just be young. We wanted to have a chance to be good this year, and I feel like we've done a really good job bringing in not just good players, but good people, and it's been a good spring for us.

**Q. Eva, you lost a lot of experience; how do you go about filling that leadership void and who is stepping up to take those leadership roles?**

EVA ROHRBACH: Yeah, I think the ladies who left us last

ADAM HUGHES: Just excited to be here. I feel like I'm becoming one of the vets. Every time we come here, it's a little bit of a reminder of just how much the sport has grown and how thankful we are for this opportunity.

Going into this season, college sports is changing. The Big Ten keeps getting better and better. There's a lot of great storylines all over the place. Our goal as a program is to create a storyline for ourselves.

We've got a special group that's put in a lot of good work this spring. It's going to look a lot different than probably it has in the past, but very, very excited to get started.

**Q. Adam, you mentioned college sports is changing. One of the big changes, the House settlement to pay the players. How has that impacted how you'll go about roster development and your program as a whole?**

ADAM HUGHES: We're trying to limit it as much as possible while also participating. I'm thankful for Jim Smith, our new AD, continuing to support volleyball. I think even behind the Commissioner's vision for where this thing is headed, we had a great meeting as a head coaches' group in February and it was incredible to hear the vision of what college volleyball could be for the Big Ten and making sure that we can hang in that and making sure that we're supported. We're thankful for that.

But the reality is we want to make sure we don't lose sight of the people that are in there, the culture. We don't want to get stuck into dollars and cents as much as we possibly can, and so far I think we've done a pretty good job of that.

**Q. AJ, tell us about your experience with the Italian National Team and playing in that system and how that really describes your game?**



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year did a great job prepping the underclassmen for how to step into the leadership role, especially Zoe and Samantha Schnitta. Amazing, amazing teammates and role models that I look up to and hope to fill their shoes and do the same.

They did an amazing job prefacing it for us. Now it's our role to step into it, and yeah, take it home.

**Q. What does that look like? During the summer, how do you do that?**

EVA ROHRBACH: I think for me personally, being more of a vocal piece on this team. I tend to lead by example. I feel like I always have just in actions, but I would also like to be vocal in this season with my words and bringing everyone together, huddles, locker room, weight lifting.

ADAM HUGHES: It's definitely one thing that I've enjoyed with the change in college sports. You get someone organically who's been in the program, knows the norms, I think Eva has done a really good job of reminding us that we want to raise the standard. We're not comfortable where we are. We want to keep moving this thing forward.

But then you get this cool experience of bringing in people from various programs. We have three players coming from SEC programs and they get to, one, remind you of the things that your program is really good at and why they're thankful that they're there, but they can also bring you tweaks or different ideas that can allow your program to keep evolving and changing. And for us, I think we've kind of leaned into that.

**Q. AJ, as one of those players transferring from an SEC school, what can we be excited for when it comes to her game and how she might fill a role on your team?**

ADAM HUGHES: Yeah, we had a really good opposite last year in Samantha Schnitta. Not just as a player, but as a person. She has big shoes, but I think in a short amount of time AJ has done a phenomenal job adjusting and coming to Maryland, and I think she's been allowed to be herself.

She's a different style of player. She's crafty. She's got great shot selection. She's played the game at a really high level.

Same thing, even though she's new she's talked about raising the standard within the program, and I'm thankful she's here.

**Q. AJ, what drew you to Maryland and what are you**

**excited about showcasing in a new environment?**

AJACK MALUAL: Well, first of all, Coach Hughes, because talking to him has been so helpful. I feel like we had an instant connection. I feel like I've been very clear with what I was looking for, what I valued the most, and I feel like he embraces so much what Maryland volleyball is and what it can offer.

It's very welcoming when your goals align to what the program stands for. So to me, my decision was really, really quick because I had no doubt that it was my place, both volleyball-wise, location-wise, in terms of having a new team, people being young, wanting people to step on the court with character and also bringing something different.

We have very different backgrounds in our team, so I felt it was the perfect place for me.

ADAM HUGHES: The transfer portal in the winter break is pretty crazy, especially with the deadline. We have like two weeks to make things happen. I was happy to get AJ on board, but literally we were driving around the Washington Memorial at 11:50 trying to race people to their hotels before the midnight deadline.

A big shout out to the staff for putting in the work to do what they needed to do.

**Q. It was as quick as she says it was?**

ADAM HUGHES: AJ and I enjoyed some coffee walking around D.C. I always like having my family around. A lot of our athletes are around during that time, so they have to take kind of a leap of faith, but I always want to make sure that they know that I will treat them like one of my daughters.

**Q. Is there any suggestions from your coach that helped you improve greatly, like great feedback?**

AJACK MALUAL: He's not like the biggest, loudest coach, and so whenever he tells us something, it really sticks in my head. So whenever it's feedback related to something technical, about hitting, about blocking, about the energy on the court, I feel like whatever he says is just really impactful because it's not so much a lot, it's just very -- one thing, that is what we've got to work on, and I feel like it's really, really a great trait that he has.

EVA ROHRBACH: I think for me, the best things I learned from the coaches is them helping me balance being not just a volleyball player and seeing my identity as outside of that and allowing that to translate to the court and keep my



mindset calm, not too overbearing in volleyball thoughts, and yeah, just reminding me I'm a person, too, I'm a student.

**Q. You're one of several teams that is refilling that setter position. For the players, you're going through these workouts in the summer, talk about getting those repetitions, getting that acclimation, and sort of resetting at that role.**

ADAM HUGHES: Yeah, we brought in a really good setter last year in Lilly Wagner, and one of her goals was if she didn't have a chance to start at the beginning of the season, she wanted to have a four-year career and make the most of it.

We got kind of into the middle of the start of the season, decided that was the best path to go forward. It's been nice to have someone that's already been within the program for a long time. She knows our verbiage, our language, she's done a good job acclimating and understanding the differences in humans and feedback loops.

So, yeah, I feel like that's not going to be that big of a challenge for us. There will be some experience challenges as a freshmen playing in these environments. This past spring we actually took advantage of that, tried to play a couple different matchups, including at Penn State. We just wanted to make sure we were trying to get ourselves in game-ready mode as much as possible. We are trying to do the same thing here in preseason. It's the first time we've actually played a scrimmage.

We're going to play my former assistant Coach AJ Bonetti in Georgetown to make sure we are doing everything we can to be ready for match one.

**Q. AJ, do you know Virginia Adriano who's going to Nebraska? Are you friends with her or played with her?**

AJACK MALUAL: No, no, not at all, but I heard about her.

**Q. Adam, your job is tough to begin with. Have the events of the last six, eight months made it harder, easier, the same?**

ADAM HUGHES: In terms of --

**Q. In terms of NCAA and all that's going on.**

ADAM HUGHES: I think there's a lot of unknowns still. I think the one thing that we've gotten more comfortable with is change is going to keep happening. A lot of times

coaches talk about have we finally hit a stabilization point; have we finally hit somewhere we can figure out how to build.

I don't foresee that happening anytime soon anyway. I feel like we learned our lessons during the COVID season of hey, adapt, keep adapting, keep changing. I feel like college athletics is going to continue to do that for a number of years.

The one thing that is nice for us is that we don't have a ton of traditions that we have to hold on to, so we can keep adapting and trying to catch up to what those norms are.

To be honest, I'm not sure where it goes, but I'm thankful we have a seat at this table because it's clear this is the best conference in the country, and I wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

**Q. Coach Hughes, especially with having four transfers, three from the SEC, what can we expect to see in terms of that identity on this team? Are there any changes you're looking to -- when you look to propel this team this coming season?**

ADAM HUGHES: I think we're looking at, or at least I'm looking at different -- this year we switched to a 12-month model and we wanted to make sure once we hit the ground running in January it was about building the team from that jump.

In the past I think we used preseason as an opportunity to kind of figure out where we were. We're having more and more freshmen join us in the spring semesters anywhere. We had 14 of 16 with us, and we felt like we did a lot of identity searching, kind of did a really good job from a staff standpoint just reflecting on what things were working, what do we want to reteach, maybe try two or three different things, and now it's trying to use the preseason as a chance to prepare for that first match.

In the past I felt like the model was more about trying to learn a lot about ourselves, and I think we learned a lot this spring.

**Q. What are some of your goals for the season, both as a team and as individual players?**

ADAM HUGHES: I'll kick off and just say we didn't have a good season last year, but we have a good program. We've had some success, and it's a tough conference. To me, there's different levels -- there's championship-level programs. Penn State just won last year, Nebraska won a couple years ago, Wisconsin has won. You're talking elite, elite levels.



And then there's some great programs that are continually around the NCAA Tournament. Then there's a bunch of us who are really, really good, and we feel like we've been able to work our way up into that echelon. We've wanted to turn our program into being great. It's not an easy challenge, but we're taking that on, and that's why I love hearing this where we have some homegrown talent, talking about raising the standard, and we have some fresh talent coming in, talking about raising the standard.

I think this group has got a lot of potential and I am really happy that the coaches picked us low at the bottom because it's nice to leave a low profile.

AJACK MALUAL: I think team-wise, our goals is, of course, win, and staying at the top half of the conference. But I think what's the most important thing for us is not getting caught up into this chasing of winning and winning but kind of losing our identity and our cohesiveness.

So I feel like our biggest challenge and goal at the same time is going to be to be consistent in doing that.

You can plan a season in my opinion as much as you want, but it's a short time, but it goes by so fast, and you cannot control everything. I think it's about who adapts faster without losing themselves in the process, both as a team and individually.

So me personally also asides from technical goals, you know, like swinging high, pressing with that block, not missing the serve when it 14-14, I don't know.

It's also going to be -- not only being a reliable teammate for my team, but also I think visualizing when things are going in a direction that it's really easy not to see and being fast and identifying that, communicating that, and adapting to be able to reach our goals.

EVA ROHRBACH: I would say just raising the standard for years to come. It's been a great program and I'm so grateful to be a part of it and leave it better for the next year and the next year and it's been great growing through it and becoming an upperclassman now, and I just want to lead this group and set the tone for this year and then seasons to come following.

**Q. You've all alluded to it, but there's so many connections just in the volleyball world in the Big Ten where Adam, you're going up against other coaches that you've coached with. You're going against players that you knew across the net. Does it invent advise you? Does it fire you up?**

ADAM HUGHES: Yeah, I got a good taste of that being behind Coach Aird when he started at Maryland and it was really weird going back into Rec Hall. Some of those things have worn off a little bit for sure, but the respect has never fallen off. I enjoy playing against Coach Steve, as I call him.

And then people ask me a lot about the Penn State experience last year watching them win, and it was a really cool experience to have my daughter, she's nine, just starting to play volleyball, and she was begging me to stay up late to watch the NCAA Tournament matches.

Part of it is probably because I grew up there, but the reality is that I just think that she saw Coach Katie as a role model, and that was a cool experience for me.

EVA ROHRBACH: Personally, I love it. I am so glad UCLA and USC and Washington and Oregon joined so I see more of my West Coast buddies. It's so fun looking across the court and seeing someone you know, a familiar face. Avry from Indiana, excited for you, babe.

AJACK MALUAL: I'm new to this conference but I have one friend that transferred too from my previous team. She's going to play at Oregon. Her name is Orian Dore. I'm really excited to see her.

But I think last also really quickly -- you're very quick as an athlete or as a coach in the sports environment to put that aside once you step on the court. You don't even remember about that, like no mercy. But once we're done, we're all hugs and smiles.

**Q. In light of the recent court settlement allowing schools to pay their athletes directly, how do you see that impacting your ability to retain players and also add players, transfer portal or recruiting-wise, and also, do you have to be more of a catalyst now where you're negotiating clauses into contracts, maybe performance incentives, buy-out clauses, being aware of how much money you have to offer?**

ADAM HUGHES: Yeah, I think the market is still trying to figure itself out. It's one of the things that's a little bit tricky. There's a lot of unknowns. I wouldn't call it hearsay but you're not sure what's real and what's not.

I would say two or three weeks ago I had a great chat with our new AD, and he's coming from the Atlanta Braves and has worked in professional sports for a very long time. He had a great conversation just talking about how in the end, culture will still matter. The best organizations still have great cultures.

So we put our attention to that. I think it was really reassuring to hear your new boss talk about that, especially as a program that we take a lot of pride in that.

**Q. Adam and Eva, last year you ended the year in a big arena, 15,000 people, a record. How do you go about building off of that and getting people to come back?**

ADAM HUGHES: If Nebraska is available on Thanksgiving weekend -- I'm just kidding. We're trying to be in there for a few matches.

I was watching the Big Ten Network years ago, and Dana Recchi talked about the two toughest places to play in Big Ten were Nebraska and Maryland. I was drinking coffee and literally spit out my coffee. She just said the small gym, the pavilion we play in, there's nobody else playing in a gym like that. It's hard. It's loud. It's intimidating.

Two or three years ago Minnesota was wearing ear plugs in our gym. So we just, hey, this is our home, and we enjoy that.

But at the same time, we never want to stop letting the program grow, and I was telling the story, I was here as an assistant when we moved from the ACC to the Big Ten, and this is a couple previous administrations ago, they weren't going to let us sell tickets. They didn't think it would be profitable or worthwhile, and now the last year you finish with over 13,000 people there.

It was a really special moment. I had to pinch myself and just remind myself not just how Maryland has grown but how the conference has grown. We are trying to get a couple more matches in the main gym this year and find that balance of having a great home court environment, but at the same time allowing the sport to continue to grow in Maryland.

EVA ROHRBACH: I agree. Bringing that fun environment to our pavilion gym and then also getting to play in XFINITY, and just connecting with fans, we love our fans, and the young ladies who come and play at camp and come and return and watch our games, it's an amazing experience, and we hope to keep growing that culture.

ADAM HUGHES: We did find out Coach Buzz was very happy we don't use main gym very often. He was very happy to have his own gym.

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