

# Big Ten Volleyball Media Days

Monday, July 28, 2025

Chicago, Illinois, USA

**Northwestern Wildcats**

**Coach Tim Nollan**

**Ayah Elnady**

**Sienna Noordermeer**

**Press Conference**



out of that is challenging. Whenever you have someone that's been a staple in a program for so long, there are challenges that are presented.

I think the thing that excites us about the future, especially just in the setting position, is we had an entire spring with two really gifted athletes in Sienna and Lauren Carter battling it out every day and working on their craft, but really rallying around each other and supporting each other knowing that one of them is going to have some really big shoes to fill, if not both of them.

I think, again, to answer your question, the spring training for us was really huge, just getting to work with our student-athletes and kind of laying some foundation and some groundwork that we can build upon.

**Q. Sienna, take us through what has been a road to recovery for you, how you're feeling going into the season and your level of excitement.**

SIENNA NOORDERMEER: Yeah, I'm really excited for this season. We've been putting in a lot of great work in and out of the gym, and just as a team diving into culture but also working and really excited to hit the ground running when the season starts and just waiting for that first preseason match.

Excited to be on the court competing and just excited for the season.

**Q. Does it feel even more substantial just because of the time that you've missed as well?**

SIENNA NOORDERMEER: Yeah, I was very appreciative of the volleyball community and how everyone embraced their arms around me through that time. It was definitely challenging and unexpected.

But fully healthy, feeling really, really good, and I think I just am very appreciative for every opportunity to be on the court and to be able to compete and play a sport that I love.

**Q. Ayah, tell us about coming to Northwestern, your**

TIM NOLLAN: Good morning. Just wanted to open up by saying how excited we are to be here again at the Big Ten media days. Looking forward to kicking off the 2025 season. It'll be year two for me with the Cats. Really, really excited about the upcoming year and the investment of the Big Ten in women's volleyball and making sure that we put on the best product in the country.

**Q. You talked a little bit about this excitement for this upcoming season. We also saw you added a lot of different grad transfers for this next season. What about that excitement do you see for this new team and the new additions coming up this season?**

TIM NOLLAN: Well, I think first and foremost, just as a staff, we feel light years ahead of where we were last year. At this time last year we had just finalized the roster. We spent most of May trying to find people to have enough athletes to really compete in the Big Ten.

So this year with a whole spring under our belt, training, the addition of the three freshmen and the five transfers, we feel like we have a roster put together to position us to have chances to win matches.

From that perspective, it's incredibly exciting going forward. We're not just trying to patch holes. We feel like we can actually train and develop and really build a program that this university wants and deserves.

**Q. How does the program transition from someone like Alexa Rousseau, who obviously played a major role, but also was a leader on this team too, and kind of what you're seeing from the team from the spring so far and heading into the season?**

TIM NOLLAN: Yeah, Alexa did a lot of things for us last year. She contributed incredibly throughout her career, but last year we asked her to both set and hit. Transitioning



... when all is said, we're done.®

**decision to come here, and just what you see your role being this season, what you want to show Big Ten fans of your game.**

AYAH ELNADY: Yeah, the decision to come to Northwestern was really easy. I feel like the school offers a lot of things that any student-athlete should be looking for. Obviously it's academics and the campus is beautiful and playing in the Big Ten, so it was a really easy decision.

Just for the season, fans can expect me to just compete hard and give my best every time, and yeah, I'm so excited for the season.

**Q. Coach, what can you say about her addition and bringing her to media days as a newcomer?**

TIM NOLLAN: Well, Ayah is just really special. Volleyball aside, she's an incredible volleyball player, but as a human she's exactly the type of person Northwestern wants.

As we went through the admittance process and having her do her interviews and things like that, everyone came back with how impressed they were with her as a human. Those are the type of people you want to rally around. Having the ability to score three and a half, four points a set doesn't hurt either.

I think from us on the volleyball court you're certainly going to look for her to score points, front row and back row. We are going to make you pass a little bit.

AYAH ELNADY: That's okay.

TIM NOLLAN: So you're going to have to focus a little bit.

But I love her approach to the game because she is just relentless in her attacking for the ball.

**Q. Ayah, what are you looking for in the Big Ten specifically, to be in this conference that has the reigning national champion and stacked with talent?**

AYAH ELNADY: We talked about it a little bit as a team. For the Big Ten we're going to into every game as the underdog, obviously. We've seen that in the preseason poll, which is, this is where the fun is because there's no outside pressure.

But within us and the team we know we can beat great teams and we can do something, so I feel like it's just going to be really fun playing with no pressure but like knowing that we have a lot of goals.

**Q. Sienna, talk about that mindset of knowing you're**

**going to be underdogs but embracing that as well.**

SIENNA NOORDERMEER: Yeah, we've talked a lot about embracing the challenge and it's going to be hard every night. There's no nights off and we are going to have to play our hardest every single night. That's so exciting for us because it just pushes you day in and day out, and we're going to use that as motivation every single day, through double days when the season gets long, through travel of just knowing that we have a fire under our butts and we're going to compete hard every single time to just surprise some teams and just showcase what we can, because we have a lot of talent and we have a lot that we can do this year.

**Q. Coach, you finished your first year as a head coach in the Big Ten. What lessons did you learn from that that you can bring into your next year coaching in this conference?**

TIM NOLLAN: Well, the Big Ten, I've said it over and over today, I'm going to keep saying it, it's the best league in the country. I think what really surprised me the most, though, was how much the other coaches care about the league and volleyball, not just their own programs.

I think that was a good reminder to make sure that we're trying to help grow the game. That's my biggest takeaway, honestly, from year one. Volleyball is volleyball. The level is great, yes. The athletes are incredibly talented. But it's still just volleyball.

But I think seeing how driven the other head coaches were to really invest in the game and invest in the sport and help the next generation of coaches and really help the next generation of athletes was really special to me and something I do not take lightly.

**Q. Coach, you seemed to perk up when she said it was an easy choice for her to come here. Was that news to you right now?**

TIM NOLLAN: No, it just excites me when a player of her caliber says it was an easy choice to make to come to Northwestern. I think, again, she's an incredibly special human. I think learning how to recruit to Northwestern is unique. We are different. We're the No. 6 academic school in the country, period. We're the smallest school in the Big Ten.

We do have just our own set of criteria and things that you're going to go through and the type of athletes we're going to look for, and I think the staff and I have done a good job of shrinking that list initially now so we're targeting the right people early.



When I heard Ayah was going in the portal, I knew she was a no-brainer.

**Q. You talked about off-season additions and making sure they fit what you're looking for at Northwestern. One of the easier additions was Lauren Curry from the softball team. What did you see from her and what do you think she can bring to the team this year?**

TIM NOLLAN: Well, Lauren is incredibly unique in the sense that she played four years of softball at Northwestern, was part of Big Ten Championship teams, was part of NCAA Tournament teams, understands winning at the elite level, and to have her to be able to transition and play for us I think was an opportunity we couldn't resist.

She's a unique player in that she's a one-foot attacker. She can hit in the middle. She can hit on the right. She can hit the slide. She's got an incredible arm.

But having her, really her leadership and guidance as a player that's had success in the Big Ten and had success in the NCAA Tournament was something that I feel can really help our squad.

SIENNA NOORDERMEER: If I may speak to Lauren as well she has been an incredible addition off the court as well. She brings such a passion and vibrance for the game, and I think it's reminded all of us why we love volleyball so much. She's been an automatic easy fit, so we're so lucky to have her on the team.

**Q. Coach, you mentioned earlier eight new additions this year. In year two for yourself, how do you build the culture in a conference like the Big Ten where it's a grind night in, night out? Sienna, you mentioned it earlier, as well. How do you build it and keep on building in a conference like the Big Ten?**

TIM NOLLAN: Well, I think first and foremost, we have to keep investing in our student-athletes. So pouring into our student-athletes like Ayah and Sienna and helping them find the best volleyball players in themselves, helping them be successful in the classroom. But really investing in our student-athletes, that's how we build our culture.

With eight newcomers coming in, I feel like we did a lot of work in the winter and spring quarters with the returners to build a really strong foundation so those eight newbies just slot in. They don't get to come in just do their own thing. They understand, okay, this is how we prepare for practice; this is the timing schedule; this is how we will conduct ourselves on road trips; this is how we succeed in the

classroom.

Again, luckily, these eight players want to be here. They understand what Northwestern is. It's not a shock that you have to go to class.

We're fortunate in that manner, but the work that the current and returners put in in winter and spring is going to pay huge dividends here in another couple weeks.

**Q. How do you feel like the House settlement and the revenue sharing era impacts your program and the sport in general?**

TIM NOLLAN: Well, obviously the settlement is kind of changing the landscape of college athletics. I think it allows us to invest in players and to help players showcase their talents and set them up for later.

I think in terms of Northwestern and how we're handling it, I think Northwestern supports it 100 percent. Northwestern supports revenue share, it's participating in revenue share.

I think we're very fortunate to have a president and an athletic administration that understands the importance of athletics and how they can be an incredibly enriching thing for the general student body.

College athletics when they're done right adds to universities. It helps drive admissions. It helps drive national interest. It helps drive marketing. So the House settlement just allows us to go out and try and do that at the highest level.

In terms of is it going to be different? Yes, it's something we're all kind of figuring out as we go. It's new to everyone. Do I think it can be great? Yes. Do I think there's going to be bumps in the road and things that no one thought of as we go along? Of course. That's all part of the new, if you will.

But I think that I feel very fortunate that we have an administration that wants to support us and wants this to be done the right way and is trying to hire the experts and the people to surround us to make sure we can do this the very best it can be done.

**Q. I assume it's quite an adjustment to go from Cairo to Lawrence, Kansas. Is Chicago a little bit more like Cairo or is there any similarity there?**

AYAH ELNADY: I mean, downtown Chicago maybe a little bit. But I think just the transition from Kansas to Northwestern was easier than from Cairo to the U.S. because now I know the culture and I know the language



more. That transition was easier.

**Q. What would you want people to know about Cairo?**

AYAH ELNADY: Well, we have great beaches. Not in Cairo, but in other cities in Egypt. We have amazing beaches.

**Q. For the players, obviously massive shifts in the collegiate landscape the past couple years. With the expanded Big Ten, you guys are going to California twice, New York, and Texas. You talked about the grind of the season. On those long road trips, how do you make sure you keep that focus when you need to?**

SIENNA NOORDERMEER: Yeah, I think first and foremost it's knowing that we're there to take care of business, and like Tim talked about, we have standards about how we're going to connect ourselves and the work we're going to do. At the end of the day it is a business trip and we're there to win, so that's our focus.

But then it's how do we continue to build our culture, lean on our culture, spend time with each other, make them enjoyable. We have a ton of fun with each other in the hotels, before and after, and I think leaning into those and making those memories along the way and really just being able to do it with your best friends and doing it for a sport that you love, it doesn't become work and it becomes something that continually energizes you.

I'm personally extremely excited for the California trips but all of the travel trips, to be able to continue to build memories and take care of business on the way.

**Q. Can you describe your training routine?**

AYAH ELNADY: So like right now in the summer, we have workouts at 5:45 --

SIENNA NOORDERMEER: A.m.

AYAH ELNADY: A.m. I'm pretty sure it's not like that everywhere, but with us -- some people have classes and some people have internships, so this made the most sense.

So we have workouts at 5:45 and then we have open gym after for like an hour, hour and a half, and then I have to go to class. Sienna has to go to internship. Then I'm done with class at around 4:00, and then just go back -- sometimes I'll go again with Sienna again at night to get some extra reps, but that's it.

SIENNA NOORDERMEER: With preseason starting up it

becomes double days, so we'll have a practice block in the morning with some lifts and then we'll do a little bit of a break and then practice in the afternoon as well.

Starting up a much heavier schedule of training, and once travel and games start we have a pretty big morning block where we practice and lift and then we go to classes and games after that.

**Q. How do you maintain your physical and mental health during the season?**

SIENNA NOORDERMEER: That's a great question, and that's something that we've definitely prioritized. Being a student-athlete at Northwestern is not easy, and you have to lean into that, and I think it comes with a lot of -- we have a lot of support and great support at Northwestern.

It's also leaning into your teammates, finding those people that you trust and love to go out and do something that you love doing and just being honest with yourself and what you need to do.

I like to think staying organized and on top of everything also really helps with that so you can try and slot in time for yourself. But we're definitely prioritizing working with our sports psychologist and all our sports staff so we can last through those really long seasons and come out of it really happy and healthy.

AYAH ELNADY: Yeah, for me, just relying on the people around me, just be vocal and yeah, just organizing my time, making sure I'm on top of everything.

**Q. When you're playing a game, what do you typically feel, like energized, focused, nervous, determined, excited? And how does that affect your performance in the game?**

AYAH ELNADY: For me, I feel very excited, especially when we have a lot of fans. I feel like they always bring the energy.

I feel like I'm the best when I'm loose and more excited.

SIENNA NOORDERMEER: I definitely do get nervous. It's an excited nervous. I love playing the game and I want to play the best I can, and I love leaning into my teammates when we all get hyped up together and that first point, that first big block where we're all just really excited and start to settle in and feel confident, I think the emotional side of volleyball is very underrated, but it's so much fun, and it really does help us play our best when we're in the right head space.



