

# Big Ten Volleyball Media Days

Monday, July 28, 2025

Chicago, Illinois, USA

**Rutgers Scarlet Knights**

**Coach Caitlin Schweihofer**

**Kenzie Dyrstad**

**Lexi Visintine**

Press Conference



obviously have some new people in some key positions but a lot of returners as well.

**Q. I'll ask the players what you're looking forward to and what you want people to know as you go through summer workouts about what this 2025 Rutgers team is going to be like.**

KENZIE DYRSTAD: I just really want people to know that we are a very close-knit team and we're working on fixing the little things and we're really working on coming together and being able to play well with one another.

LEXI VISINTINE: I would say we've been working extremely hard in summer workouts and lift and practice and that we're ready to compete and play against the best.

**Q. Talk about Lauren Wilcock, a transfer, also a Masters biomedical sciences major. How does that match with the volleyball training schedule?**

CAITLIN SCHWEIHOFFER: I'll talk about the educational piece first. We have one of the best degree programs in biomedical sciences. I've learned a lot about that graduate program. But the dean of that program has had multiple athletes come through, so they know how to work with the schedules.

Rutgers being such a large institution we offer a lot of classes at different times. One of the things we're doing this year is shifting our practice block a little bit later in the day. We practiced earlier in the day in the past, but moving to a little bit later in the day.

It's always my goal to have local talent on the team. Lauren was in the ones pair at Washington. She was also in the ones pair before that at South Carolina and something that really stood out to me about her was she typically had a partner that was younger than her.

So from a leadership standpoint I thought she would be a wonderful add, help support our passing unit. And there's been a transition for her obviously taking the game from outside to inside, just the speed, but I got to watch her do some training during camp last week, and I thought she

CAITLIN SCHWEIHOFFER: Year four, wow! I can't believe it. It's gone fast. It's my sixth season, headed into my sixth season at Rutgers, and it's remarkable how much this program has really shifted over the past six seasons, and I'm really excited to be here to obviously let Lexi and Kenzie talk about their experience this past spring as well as what the team is -- what you're going to be experiencing as a Rutgers team in the fall.

Thank you all for being here and being part of this media day experience.

**Q. Coach, I want to ask as you head into 2025 and continuing to build what you're most looking forward to and wanted to showcase with this particular squad this year.**

CAITLIN SCHWEIHOFFER: Yeah, this team last year was incredibly young. We started four freshmen, a couple of sophomores. We only graduated one key player. Obviously she was a major contributor, but we feel like we've been able to definitely replace that position through the transfer portal.

So I'm just excited that we're able to use the experience that we had in unfortunately being defeated in some really tight matches last year, but actually having had the opportunity to play in those matches in the past, we've never really had that experience to go to five sets in so many matches that we did.

Unfortunately losing them at the end I think came down to a little bit of inexperience and just team leadership as a whole, but obviously I gained the opportunity to learn and the rest of my coaching staff to learn how to move forward and really get over the finish line in those matches.

I think you're going to see a bit of a different Rutgers team but also the same -- it's kind of hard to explain. We



really has meshed nicely.

**Q. Can I ask the players what that transition is like? Do you notice when someone has that primary beach background?**

KENZIE DYRSTAD: Yeah, we mess around with Lauren, especially when we're sitting kids at the camp was like, oh, isn't that a carry though when she was setting, and she's like, I'm working on it. So she's definitely working on that. Obviously setting in beach is a little bit different, but she's working on that and then a few footwork things.

And she said diving was a lot different. She got pretty bruised up the first couple weeks of open gym. But she's meshed really nicely with us, and I'm super excited to be able to keep playing with her.

CAITLIN SCHWEIHOFFER: I was joking with her because obviously Lexi has a really strong jump top spin serve and Lauren was like, well, I did it on the beach. I was like, that's a free ball. We've got to be better at that. She was like, I just have to figure out how to hit the indoor ball a little bit harder.

**Q. What is your mindset coming into the upcoming season?**

KENZIE DYRSTAD: For me personally, my mindset is we get to play against the best of the best day in, day out. There's not a lot of conferences where you get to say that you play top-25 teams back-to-back nights.

Really just enjoying the moment and trying to remember that it's so cool to be able to play some of the best athletes in the country and really focusing on that.

LEXI VISINTINE: I would say something similar. Going into my senior year I really want to make this my best season and enjoy every moment.

**Q. Coach, how do you determine playing time, and what are some factors considered for freshmen coming in?**

CAITLIN SCHWEIHOFFER: Well, playing time. We train for about 25 days before our first game. Obviously we have the opportunity to see these players on more of a year-round basis.

Summer access would be wonderful, but we get to see them play a lot. We also were able to go on a foreign trip this year, so I got a little bit of an early insight.

We were able to bring one of our freshmen, Imani Howell

on that trip with us, so got to see how she meshed with the team. I think playing time comes from a few things. You can perform well in practice but can you replicate that in a game, and there's certain players who can and there's certain players who can't. We learn that over time of just getting to know them and experiencing. It's doesn't mean that's every night, but that definitely is something that goes into it.

I think competitive personality, how you hold yourself under the pressure, under the big lights, the fans, how do you recover, are you taking care of your body correctly. So we play back-to-back nights sometimes, and are the players that are able to repeat their Friday night skill level on Saturday night.

Then last but not least, obviously experience. As you get older you get more comfortable, so that goes into it as well. We haven't really had that much opportunity to really have a lot of experienced players out there, so this will be the first year where I think we have a junior and senior class that is able to really hold their own and it's not just all freshmen out there, freshmen and sophomores out there.

**Q. For the players and coaches, how do you guys process game film? Do you watch the Big Ten Network? Do you listen without the sound? How do you take in a game?**

KENZIE DYRSTAD: Usually before games we'll break down film through volley metrics, so we'll look at hitting tendencies, serving tendencies, all that type of stuff. We really break it down to what are people's very specific tendencies so we can try and like help prevent what they're really, really good at or things like that.

LEXI VISINTINE: Yeah, we usually take it in offense. We focus on that and scout their offense, and then their defense, which makes it easier to digest. Then we form a game plan about what we should do.

**Q. How do you guys know when you watch the game? Do you watch broadcast? How do you watch the game?**

CAITLIN SCHWEIHOFFER: So I have this saying where I'm like, are we watching it as a player, are we scouting this, or are we watching this as a fan. It's totally okay to watch games as a fan. They're both from states that are big volleyball states and they might just want to turn on the television and watch the game as a fan.

But it's a very different mindset when you're watching it to prepare for a team. I wouldn't recommend that they just turn on BTN and just watch the game and say, hey, we're



prepped. No, it's not like that.

We're on the road sometimes and we'll turn it on at night just in the hotel when we're eating dinner or whatever if it's a game after hours. But when it comes to film breakdown, our technical director does an unbelievable job of creating small videos for the players. We break down practice film so they can see themselves playing. We break individual reps.

This year -- I think in the past having a young team we really force fed a lot of the scouting report to them, and they did a great job of memorizing set 1. We did a lot better job -- won a ton of set 1s.

We didn't do a great job of being able to transition into when the other team made an adjustment in set 2, 3, 4. We almost needed to have a whole 'nother practice to learn about that.

So we are spending more time less team specific things and more about player tendencies, and so that's an area they want to focus on this year. They do small group sessions. A lot of film.

**Q. Coach, you alluded to the foreign travels that you guys had. I think this was the first time --**

CAITLIN SCHWEIHOFFER: Ever, mm-hmm.

**Q. And for all three of you, tell us what that does for your program, chemistry, competition, et cetera.**

CAITLIN SCHWEIHOFFER: Yeah, our main two donors who really helped fund that trip aren't going to want to have their names announced, but we were very supported when it came from a donor relationship to really drive that trip.

It was a goal of mine when I first was hired that I wanted to do that trip and wait for the right timing of it. We've had an opportunity actually to do this probably for the last three years but I wasn't sure the team dynamic, everything was exactly where I wanted it to be that would really jump start the next season.

I felt after this spring -- actually after last fall of knowing we were retaining the majority of our team, having the opportunity to train for the extra 10 days before that trip and then go on that trip, the relationships, and then the growth from a player development that we were able to create.

So again, yes, it was the first trip Rutgers has ever done. I was able to do a foreign trip with some of my previous institutions and I just saw how successful those seasons

are. Actually one of the ways we got the trip pushed through is we had to do some research about the success of other programs on years after foreign trips.

There really is a trend that's related to that, so that was a driving factor for those donors to really push through that trip.

But I had a wonderful time. I got to know my players a lot more on a personal level. My daughter was able to go, my mother was able to go, so they got to see that side of my life more.

It was a lot of together time, but I was actually honestly -- maybe you guys can explain how we got through that trip, but I was shocked how there really was no fighting. Everyone seemed to really still enjoy being around each other at the end of that trip, and that was pretty cool.

KENZIE DYRSTAD: Yeah, it was so cool to be able to experience new cultures, especially we have a girl on our team, Ema, she's from Serbia, so to be able to experience her culture, her home, it was so cool.

Just all the new experiences and being able to create new memories, especially with the new people, that just makes your team so much closer. It's going to really translate to the court hopefully.

LEXI VISINTINE: I would just add that it was also interesting to see the different styles of play. I feel like every country had their unique way of playing. I think it was a great experience for us to grow.

CAITLIN SCHWEIHOFFER: For a player like Lexi who is going into her senior year and potentially what's next, do I stay playing volleyball, do I go into the workforce, what do I do. I think opening her eyes and kind of putting words in your mouth, but she had a wonderful foreign trip, and the doors that opened from just other teams getting to see her play and different countries that might not have been their first thought about a 5'10" outside hitter, they got to see how successful she was against really quality players.

We played the U-21 Italian team and she had an unbelievable hitting percentage against them, so it was just really interesting.

**Q. What keeps you guys motivated when things get tough in volleyball?**

LEXI VISINTINE: I would say there's a lot of younger girls who looked up to us, and I think that's the main thing that keeps me motivated, is playing for my younger self and playing for younger girls that would love to be in my shoes.



KENZIE DYRSTAD: For me, same thing as Lexi. Playing for younger me who loved the game. I still love the game. Really just focusing on my joy for the game just really keeps me going.

**Q. Caitlin, how has the House settlement impacted your team management? And for the players, is that a topic of conversation or are you discussing that? Is that on your mind of how the sport is growing and evolving?**

CAITLIN SCHWEIHOFFER: Yeah, the House settlement is interesting. Obviously I followed along the whole process for the past several years. I don't know how much they've followed along the ins and outs of it.

But I think a lot of coaches will say that's not the reason they got into coaching originally was because of where we're at now, but I do think after really trying to process and ask the questions as to why we got to this point, I understand.

I see how much is on their plate and how much is on all the players' plates in all different sports and how much they really do represent these institutions in such a high-quality way that it is only fair that they're able to be compensated for their time and what they bring to the table.

However, what they probably will realize is it's a tough ask for every institution, not only Rutgers but every institution. I was just talking to the head of our booster club, and she's involved with the Women in Finance group at Rutgers, and they did an entire overview of how all the Big Ten teams would fare when it comes to paying out this amount of money year after year after year.

The reality is it's going to be tough for pretty much 98 percent of institutions. How that translates, I think Rutgers is doing a wonderful job of trying to keep the experience the same for all of our athletes regardless of what sport they play, and we've been able to be at a point where I have fought for the past several years when I took over this program so make sure that we were operationally funded the same way other teams in the Big Ten were, because in the past the volleyball program was not.

And so in order to be successful we need to remain at that level. Obviously doing things like selling tickets for the first time ever in program history was a big deal, and that's something that I pushed for for several years, and now I want to show that we have this fan base that's able to generate some income back into the university, and it just shows how invested the region is in the sport of volleyball.

Again, when it comes to player to player, those are individual conversations, and Rutgers is part of that mix for volleyball. Obviously we're going through some administrative changes and we don't need to get into that, but we're going to figure out who's leading the charge, and that is whoever that may be.

Obviously we've had wonderful interim athletic directors in the meantime, but whoever full-time leads the charge, they know that volleyball needs to be a priority sport because it is in this conference.

**Q. Have you had conversations on the player level at all?**

KENZIE DYRSTAD: I like to ask Caitlin questions about it. I see a lot of it, especially on Twitter I'll see people post about it. Most of my conversations have just been asking Caitlin, what does this mean, what is this, stuff like that.

LEXI VISINTINE: Pretty much the same.

CAITLIN SCHWEIHOFFER: It's really important to me that I treat my players as if they are professional athletes because they basically are professional athletes. So I want to make sure that they're part of their own process and that I'm as transparent as possible with the decisions I have to make and how it affects them. I don't want to hide anything from them.

Obviously there's things they don't need to be privy to that don't affect them immediately, but I think it's important that they're aware of decisions that not only the NCAA is making, not only the ABCA is making, but also that Rutgers is making and I am making that will affect them in the near future.

**Q. Can you talk a little bit about what went into your decision to bring Kenzie and Lexi to media days this year?**

CAITLIN SCHWEIHOFFER: Sure. Well, Kenzie has been a captain for us. She was captain as a sophomore, which I think is really -- maybe a rare thing. I don't know how many teams have a sophomore captain. But she was our libero full time last season. She has a ton of experience. Also her younger sister is coming in the -- I don't know if I can say that.

But we have a family tree growing in the Dyrstad family, so it's something she has really invested in this Rutgers process and growth process. She was one of the first true commits that I had for the class of 2023, and she opened the door for us in the Nebraska market, and now that's growing exponentially year after year, the interest. I



thought it was really important she represent this team and this program.

Lexi is a really unique story where she came in as a walk-on, as a freshman, and I didn't know exactly what role she would fill. She played more of a utility player, but she has taken every single bit of feedback that I have given her, that the rest of the staff has given her in great stride and now she is a player we can't take off the court.

So I felt like she really earned that honor to represent this team, and it just shows that just like this program that we're trying to create as a whole, that sometimes it takes time to meet your goals. It doesn't always happen overnight, but the reality is if you stick with something regularly, good things can happen.

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