

Big Ten Volleyball Media Days

Monday, July 28, 2025

Chicago, Illinois, USA

Indiana Hoosiers

Coach Steve Aird

Ava Vickers

Avry Tatum

Press Conference



they were there all June, all July working.

We have depth. We've got fantastic talent. Recruiting has gone exceptionally well. Again, full credit to my staff, Rachel Morris and Kevin Hodge and Matt Kearns and those guys working, working, working to evaluate talent and recruit.

We've had a couple good years. I think we're right at the beginning of what's going to be a pretty impressive stretch for the next three or four years, and I couldn't be more proud to do that.

To the administration, obviously Scott Dolson and Jeremy Gray and President Pam Whitten. They care about volleyball. Indiana cares about volleyball. It's why it's exciting to go to work.

Finally just to the Big Ten, a thank you to everyone involved, from Commissioner Petitti on down. They care about volleyball and you guys can tell. It's really, really invigorating to be part of it and to be a small part of it, and excited to get into the year.

With that, we will open things up, take some questions, and appreciate you guys being here with us today.

Q. Coach, you get a chance to play Purdue in Gainbridge Fieldhouse and a second straight year in Mackey Arena. Just the opportunity to play the bigger venues and how does it speak to the growth of (indiscernible)?

STEVE AIRD: I think it's a fantastic opportunity for -- the question was playing in venues like Mackey and in Gainbridge and whatnot. It's exceptional. The opportunity to compete in places that have 14,000, 18,000 people. There are venues in the Big Ten that are certainly daunting when you see the crowds, but for us we talk about we want to develop professionals.

Over the last two or three years we've churned out six, seven, eight, nine kids that have played in professional leagues all over the world. We want to continue to do that. That's an opportunity to see and feel what pro is.

STEVE AIRD: Good afternoon. Might start a little bit untraditionally, but if you know me this is how I roll. I want to start how the by congratulating the Penn State Nittany Lions and my close friend Katie Schumacher on an amazing year. Katie and I were freshmen together at Penn State, and from day one of campus, one of my great friends in life and just someone I love and adore. So I'm proud of her. Proud as an alum. Congratulations to them.

I'm not here, and I think Katie would say the same thing, without Russ Rose being Russ Rose. So whenever I come to Big Ten events, Big Ten volleyball events, it's important to me to remind people of the best to ever do it. I miss him.

On that note, and I thought about this walking in the door, so many of these unbelievable coaches are moving on to new chapters. So whether it's John moving on or Mary Wise or Coach Rose, Coach Shoji, none of us would be here without incredible commitments from people who were driving mini vans with tank tops and trying to find row hotel rooms for players in the '70s and '80s and whatnot.

So much of these what athletes are exposed to today and get today and get to do -- get to do -- comes from so many people who worked so hard for so many decades for this to be the case.

I just wanted to maybe say a universal thank you. I look in the Big Ten head coaches' room and it's young and it's exciting, but none of us would be where we are without those people being who they were and the athletes that have worked so hard to make this what Big Ten volleyball is now.

To Indiana, this is the most aligned program, deep top to bottom group of people that I've been around since 2013 when I won a championship at Penn State. The coaching staff is exceptional. The team and these guys will tell you,

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Luckily, because of the state, volleyball has been so good for so long, Purdue has been so good for so long, and Dave has done an unbelievable job of having a great program, we're aspiring to get there.

When I took the job, they were dead last in the Big Ten. We're better. We're not where we want to be, but we're getting closer and closer.

I anticipate certainly both matches to be highly competitive and a great opportunity for young people to show up and see volleyball on that type of stage and to see role models like these two and aspire to be them one day.

Q. Speaking of these two as role models, can you talk about the decision that went into bringing Ava and Avry, and what is it like to represent Indiana volleyball here at media days?

AVA VICKERS: Yeah, it honestly means so much to us. Me especially, I'm from Indiana. I'm from Fishers, Indiana, so being able to, one, not only play here at a school that is in my home state and be able to represent it in this kind of light really just means the world for me, so I am super grateful for the opportunity to be here.

AVRY TATUM: To be able to transfer to a program that brought me in made me feel like I'm at home has been awesome. It's great to come here and then return the favor and represent the team like I should.

STEVE AIRD: For us it was pretty straightforward. We've got a lot of new faces. I think the conference will learn we have some really neat new players. But these two, especially over the last six to eight months, have done such an amazing job of bringing in the young people and getting them up to speed on just life.

They're better human beings than they are volleyball players and they can both flat-out play, so that should tell you something. I enjoy seeing them every single day. It's fun going to work and being around kids that are excited and fired up and love what you're building and want to be part of what you're building, and they've been that the whole way.

For me, like Russ had a great line that he said he wanted to recruit players with character, but also characters. So I need people with -- Av's a little spicy at times and I see a lot of myself from my playing days in her. And this one to my left, my DJs, she models, she's got a clothing line that probably just sold 10,000 units on social media.

They're just really unique human beings, and every single

day we talk about a lot of stuff that almost never comes back to volleyball, it's business, it's life, it's family, and we consider each other that and it's been pretty cool.

Q. I imagine the worst reputation to be recruiting national champion beach players to come join your program. How did your experience with Delaney impact or did it impact what you were looking for in Jesse and what does she bring to the game?

STEVE AIRD: I was going to make a dig about being from Toronto and there's not a lot of beach volleyball in the winters, but actually beach volleyball in Canada is awesome, so I can't really make fun of myself. A lot of this comes back, I think, to my staff. So it's Rachel Morris, it's Kevin Hodge, it's their relationship in California. I was out there for four years with my wife, and we lived in Newport Coach, so we got to know a bunch of people. But I think it's all relationship driven.

A lot of these kids that play and have that fifth year are interested in maybe kicking the tears. Delaney was one of the best passers in the conference and maybe the country. Had a great feel. I haven't spent a lot of time with Jess Smith yet in the gym for obvious reasons, but we're pretty excited to see what she brings to the table.

There is a maturity to it. These are full-blown women that 22, 23 years old who have been around the block. They know how to win. They have been part of championship culture. They're very selfless.

It's an amazing thing where they have a partner in beach and you're to serve your partner, and it's really that. But those skills, those soft skills transfer and they become very quickly leaders in their own space. They're authentic, confident, so for me, yeah, it's a great fit.

When you're as young as you are, because we bring in a lot of young people, having a couple North Star humans in your program -- that's the one thing people miss a lot when you're talking about building programs.

The Penn States, the Nebraskas might have been good for 40 years. They've always had that. Programs that are building and trying to find it need some people who do it right, they come early, they stay late, they're good people, they take care of their bodies, they're invested, they watch film. Some things that might be taken for granted are things these guys do.

So these guys do it. Jess will do it. Delaney was phenomenal. I think the more leadership you have, the better you're going to be.



Q. You spoke about this a bit in your opening statement about the kind of momentum you feel around the program right now with three straight non-losing seasons, first time since 2010. What do you feel like is going to elevate this team even more and especially looking at the fact that you don't have that foundation of Camryn Haworth at the setter position and how that continues to be a transition?

STEVE AIRD: Yeah, in business it's kind of the pinwheel. You have a product or something and people like it and they buy it, and then it goes and more products -- it's the same thing with building this company. You want to bring in good people. You want people to attend. You want the community to be excited. That starts to happen. You recruit better players, have more success and the thing starts to pinwheel.

Where we are now I think is right at the beginning of another cycle where we're going to make another jump. So much of it is depth. I think in the past we've had fantastic players, but an injury here and an injury there and we were in real trouble. I don't feel that way this year. I feel like if we have an injury we have enough depth to sustain a very high level of play.

My gut is that the practice environment will be as competitive as it's been in a really long time, certainly maybe since my Penn State days.

I feel really, really good about what's happening. They're the right kind of kids. They're really, really good people. They care a ton about what we're doing. They're grateful, and I think these guys will tell you -- we talk about that every day. We want to play hard and play fast. We want to develop pros. We know what our identity is and we know the type of person we want in the program, and again, thanks to my staff and their hard work, we've drilled that.

Q. How excited are you to see Charlotte back on the court after everything she's been through, and how were you able to support her through her recovery to getting to Indiana?

STEVE AIRD: Yeah, her story is remarkable. For those in the room that don't know, Charlotte Vinson a year ago had an infection and almost lost her life. I was at the hospital with the family. We didn't know if she'd make it through the week or the day. She's full go. She's been in camp. She's training. I think the girls will tell you she can flat-out play.

Obviously well trained and well coached. But the thing for me, it allows me some perspective because you get caught up in it and it's hard and what we do is hard and we're

chasing great and it's a hard thing to do. Then you see her and you remember there's a lot more to life. So there's a perspective every day when I'm around her.

Listen, she's competitive and she's chippy and her game and her personality when she plays is one thing, but she has such an appreciation for things that we all take for granted all the time. I think that's certainly a key point in the season that's going to be an amazing lesson for all of us.

Obviously thank God she's with us and she's going to be a really good player for a long time.

AVRY TATUM: She's just a stud and I'm so happy she's with us.

AVA VICKERS: Being able to play with her in high school, she was actually on the same team with me. I was a senior and she was a sophomore I believe. Just being able to see how her game has evolved and even her as a person has evolved has been so amazing and I am just so excited to see what her future holds for her.

Q. On a related note, you're bringing in six or seven freshmen, a huge freshman class. Talk about the energy in the gym and how all of those freshmen push you guys to be better.

AVA VICKERS: Yeah, the energy right now is awesome. They came in just hungry honestly. They want to work. They want to compete. I think being surrounded by not only players that want that, but also freshmen who want that, it's their first couple months in the gym and they already have this level of compete inside of them, I think it just makes us more excited for what the future holds being with them.

AVRY TATUM: It's been super competitive and a lot of fun, and I think it's really good for us to have freshmen that are hungry and ready to play. It pushes us returners a lot more to be better for them and be better for us, and I think it's been an amazing environment to be in and I'm really excited.

Q. Ava, Coach talked about all the things you have going on outside of volleyball. What motivates you to establish a different kind of brand for yourself, taking on different things, the entrepreneurial spirit as well?

AVA VICKERS: Yeah, I feel like a lot of times college athletes feel like the sport is kind of their personalities, and for a long time I always thought that when I was you playing volleyball, that that was kind of who I was.

But I kind of decided to branch out a little bit when I got to college and figure out the things I really do love, and a big part of me is fashion and clothes and business.

So this past winter break actually I got to work on starting my own clothing brand. It's called Project U. I launched it a couple months ago. It's hoodies, and the whole line of it is basically just to show that you're the greatest project you will ever work on.

I knew that when starting this clothing brand I wanted it to mean something to people. There's a logo. People will wear logos. I feel like representing a message means so much more, and to be able to actually start this brand really just proved to myself that I can truly do what I put my mind to.

So it's been so fun, and being able to balance that with volleyball, I've been trying to figure out, and I think when starting it that was kind of the reason I was a little bit hesitant starting it was because high level of volleyball, high level of training, time management is difficult.

But I think I'm getting there figuring out how to manage both, but I've just been so grateful to have the support system I have with this brand honestly.

Q. You've also dealt with some injury in your career. How are you feel comfort coming into the season and your level of excitement going forward?

AVA VICKERS: Yeah, injury is always difficult. I feel like a lot of athletes when they go through injury they look at it more of a negative light thinking about how much it sucks not to be able to be in practice or lifts or workouts. But I try to view it in a way that would benefit me when I was coming back from my injury. I tried to view it as I can get better at other skills that don't necessarily require my athletic ability.

I tried to be a better leader for the team, a better teammate to people, or even a better coach to other girls in that position. I think by going through this injury and learning all those other skills about myself that weren't necessarily directly attached to my athleticism because of my injury, it makes me a lot better going into this coming season knowing that I've learned all of those skills.

Q. I mentioned Camryn Haworth, but one of the more notable setters and it feels like there's a new influx coming in. How does that process work especially once you start to finally hit practice about getting those reps, that acclimation of that person stepping into a new role?

STEVE AIRD: Well, we'll have three setters on the roster starting this season, two of which have been in the system and understand and can play at a very high level. We feel very good about them. We're adding a young lady from Serbia, Teodora Krackovic, who is one of the better players at her position, certainly in Europe.

Captained the national team, understands how to win. They just won the European qualifier beating Bulgaria in Sofia. She's very, very good. But I really don't know system yet. I don't know enough about the team. I think a lot of it just seeing how the young people kind of put the pieces in place I guess.

My job will be harder for the best possible reasons because we have depth.

Camryn was a phenomenal player and a really neat kid, and she's gone on to play beach at Florida State. Back to Lincoln's earlier thing, we're trading the other way. We're giving cam to the beach game for a year and my gut is she'll be awfully good there.

Yeah, a lot of coaches have systems. I've always just believed in players. I think players beat systems. I think you find the best players that you can and you find out what they do well, and you try to get that to mesh and for them to play hard and have a competitive fight and spirit together. That's what I believe will be part of the success.

Q. How have you guys been involved with the community and doing activities to build that relationship with the Bloomington area and your fans?

AVA VICKERS: I feel like it's a lot easier nowadays with NIL being an option. I feel like we've had some really great local businesses that have wanted to work with us and us with them, and a lot of times it isn't even an NIL transaction it's just genuinely our love for a lot of these local companies.

I think also when it comes to just going to school here at IU, we build relationships with professors and students on campus and just try to be the best representation of IU Volleyball outside of the court to be able to have the best fans and best environments inside of the court.

AVRY TATUM: Also going along with that, we do kids camp all through July, and I think it's really important for us to kind of just be big role models for all those little girls. And I think when we are in the gym with them, I think being the best person we possibly can so we can be good role models for them has been super important.

So July is really important for us when it comes to the



program and inspiring those little girls.

Q. How has the House settlement impacted your roster management and revenue sharing, above and beyond NIL?

STEVE AIRD: Yeah, it's changed dramatically. I think even if you go back to five to ten years ago, how you think about building a program, the transfer portal, the House settlement, rev share, all of these things for a lot of coaches, and kind of my nod to the coaches before us, many of them didn't get into this for that. So I understand that.

I really like it. I have a business law degree. I wanted to be an agent. I'd like to be in a front office one day. For me this makes a lot of sense. I want all of my players to feel valued.

These two I think would hopefully agree that the team, everyone on the team is seeing something, and we're doing a really good job of getting it to them.

Indiana cares. They're supporting us. We're going to be able to take care of our players. I want the players to make money. I feel like every single day, though, there's a different -- you read an article here and an article there and I consume a lot of it just to try to be ahead, but the goal is can you give them the best possible experience that you can. In a lot of ways some of the programs in our conference might be more the Yankees and we might be a little bit more like Toronto or a little bit more like Milwaukee, but it doesn't mean you can't win the whole damned thing.

I think it's about doing it the right way, taking care of people. We also -- it comes back to we want to take care of them as people. They're going to make money, but I want them to make money for 40 years and I want to set them up. I send more stuff to Ava about business than I do volleyball. I'll wake up at 4:00 and there will be a Louis Vuitton something, and I'm like, this is for her, and there's some marketing thing.

You're trying to get them to be aligned and figure it out and there will be challenges, especially developing retention. Players will have opportunities and I think that's also good.

I want players who want to play at Indiana, and the players who want to be at Indiana, I want to do everything I can to take care of them.

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