

Big Ten Volleyball Media Days

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

Oregon Ducks

Coach Trent Kersten

Orian Droe

Sophia Meyers

Press Conference



just connection between all of you throughout these couple weeks?

SOPHIA MEYERS: I think it's an amazing opportunity not only for friendships, everybody coming in from all different backgrounds, all different ages, and never playing together before. I think we've approached it from a really fun way this summer just spending a lot of time off the court, going to the river, getting ice cream, just doing small things every week together, and we've already built great relationships and it's been a lot of fun.

ORIAN DRORE: I think it also really helps that we're all going through the same situation, and so we kind of really bond over that as well.

I have a lot of conversations about this season and how we're all excited and just having the same opportunity I think already is such a great foundation to really connect with each other.

Q. Sophia, what led you to want to follow Coach to Oregon? The opportunity to also play in the Big Ten after you were first-team all-conference last year and taking on that challenge for someone who you have familiarity with?

SOPHIA MEYERS: Yeah, Trent is someone really special to me. Same with Sarah, who is also at Oregon. Last season as a senior, they completely changed me as a volleyball player and as a human being, and to be able to do that so late in my career is just really special.

To have the opportunity to do that at the Big Ten level with Trent and Sarah has just been an amazing opportunity, and just getting the opportunity to see him transform a whole group of girls in the same way is really exciting.

Q. New to the Big Ten, what were your perceptions of the Big Ten from the outside, and how are you looking forward to the journey ahead this year?

ORIAN DRORE: I think for me the Big Ten has always been one of the most challenging conferences. I'm always watching these girls on TV and they're all rock stars.

TRENT KERSTEN: Good morning. Super excited to be a part of the Big Ten. Excited to be a part of Big Ten media days. Can't wait to get rolling with our team this year. We've got 16 people who haven't played together before, so what a cool opportunity for us to collaborate and figure out how we can discover our best volleyball.

I think a lot of people will talk about the challenges and -- I don't know, just some of the things that come along with having so many new people, and I think from our end, we're looking at it as an opportunity, a blank slate for people to try and discover their best, whether they're an incoming freshman or a fifth year, and seeing how we can build and collaborate together and be playing some good volleyball during the season.

Q. Trent, you've been in new jobs before. How is the challenge different at Oregon starting from scratch, building up this roster from what you inherited?

TRENT KERSTEN: Yeah, so each time I've walked into a new position, new team, they're completely different than the last. I think the lessons you can take is how to have empathy for change. When people are going through it -- we've got one returner in Maya who has been just a rock star. Couldn't ask for anyone better to build a program around and for someone to welcome a bunch of new people in.

I think the other parts are just how do you build teammateship, how you build an environment where people feel like they can collaborate and be curious about the game and how they can develop themselves to help our team accomplish what we want to accomplish.

Q. What Coach said in his opening statement about it being a fresh page, for having 15 newcomers, 16 people who haven't played together before, how are you approaching building those connections, building



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I think it's really exciting to be in this conference. It's definitely a challenge, and especially being new, but I do have high expectations for myself and for the team.

I think I just feel a lot of excitement coming into the Big Ten for sure.

SOPHIA MEYERS: Yeah, same with me. After playing in several different conferences before, the Big Ten is the conference that I want to play in. It is where the best volleyball is. I think it's not only growing in volleyball but it's promoting women's sports through events like this. It's giving us opportunities to have a voice and to show what we can do, and I think that's something really special to be a part of.

Q. Is there a story about your first name?

ORIAN DRORE: I appreciate it, but no, not really a story. Where I'm from, Or means light, so that's kind of where I got my name from.

Q. Did you consult another coach that's been through what you're going through here, talk to somebody about how it came together?

TRENT KERSTEN: Yeah, I've been super lucky to have a lot of great mentors throughout my career. I get to coach in a conference with somebody that I played for in Brad Keller. How cool is that? I'm so proud of everything that he's accomplished at USC and can't wait to see what they do this year.

But then there's also people that have been in my corner for a long time, including assistants that are in the Big Ten. I remember Kevin Hodge as an assistant at Indiana and I remember taking his kiddo on a visit and walking him around UCLA's campus when I was playing. And then he just recently married Rachel Morris who's a Duck alum. How cool is that? The small-world connections.

I think there's other people that I'm going to leave out, and Keegan has been someone that's always been a great sounding board for me, a great mentor. I'm looking forward to being in a conference with so many friends and familiar people.

Then probably the biggest influence on my life has been John Speraw who's now the president and CEO of USA Volleyball. So super happy I get to be connected to him and bounce ideas off him back and forth.

Q. What keeps you guys motivated during training or after a tough loss?

ORIAN DRORE: I think support from teammates is something that is really important to me. I feel like I play for my teammates a lot, and we kind of all do the same thing together. It's not easy; it gets hard. But just having that support and knowing that we have the same common goal definitely makes it easier, and I feel like it's really important for us to motivate each other.

SOPHIA MEYERS: I'd say for me, I struggled with this a lot up until last year. Something else that Trent taught me is that failure is what is going to make you grow, and learn from your failure. I think after being able to accept that, you turn losses into learning moments, and that's kind of what I've just gone by.

In the practice gym, after games, I'm really excited for our gym to learn that this year, too.

Q. Sophia, you said that Trent transformed your game. Describe for us what kind of coach he is, why that connection is so good, and kind of do you feel like you also help facilitate when you have a brand new head coach where you have that familiarity and getting everyone on the same page and understanding how things operate with that experience?

SOPHIA MEYERS: Yeah, Trent, from the beginning he saw me as more than a volleyball player, and I think that is something really rare and special about him, is that's how he recruits, that's how he picks out his staff members, and it's seen with Gio and Laura being brought in. They're a lot more than coaches.

With that, he has built this belief in me. I think that's what he has taught me, to believe in myself, believe in the people that I'm around, and that has ultimately changed me as a volleyball player and a human, just having belief -- regardless of who we're playing, regardless of what we're going through in school or in our life.

That has just changed everything for me. Along with that, what I said earlier about failure, failure is okay, and we preach that in our gym.

So I'm really excited for him to step into the Oregon gym and to start just talking about all of that with everybody else. I think we've started already as a team believing in each other, especially with the group of really young girls who are transforming from club to the Big Ten. It's scary. But they're all doing a really good job, and it's the constant belief in this team and this new roster, and it's definitely being seen already.

Q. Trent, when you joined the conference and were



announced as head coach, I think it was maybe a day later, maybe two days later it was the annual coaches' meeting, you were thrown into that right away. Talk about the whirlwind of jumping in. I know you mentioned Brad, but also the support you've received from the coaches in this league.

TRENT KERSTEN: Yeah, I mean, being a part of the Big Ten has been a dream. It's a dream because it's not only the most elite conference as far as volleyball, but there's some really great people that are within it.

The whirlwind of getting announced and knowing the exact roster situation and then wanting to go recruit and then you find out, hey, you've got Big Ten meetings the next morning and you get thrown into that.

I think college athletics has been kind of a cauldron of change over the past 10 years, so as coaches we have to be accustomed to that, and we have to think about coming into our day and here's our plan of what we think our day looks like but knowing rarely does that happen the way it's all planned out on the calendar. Someone is going to come into your office, something is going to happen and you need to be there for people.

Ultimately as coaches we work with people first. They're not just Xs and Os on a chalkboard, so they're going to be personal things that come up, they need help, they need guidance, this or that. You spoke about the relationships with the coaches here.

There's coaches that have been there for me on some of the tough days and there's coaches that I'll continue to rely on. So I'm super grateful to be a part of the Big Ten community.

Q. We've talked about how new this roster is. Someone with Big Ten experience is Valentina Vaulet. Talk about welcoming her with the program with her experience.

TRENT KERSTEN: Yeah, super excited about Val. Gosh, someone that probably brings in for sure the most Big Ten experience from our roster. She's got a great serve. She does things at an unbelievable high level. She really wants to learn the skill of passing, so I'm excited to try and train her on that.

But yeah, we'll rely on her experience and her being in the Big Ten for the past two years.

I think the last piece is she was left off the preseason All-Big Ten team, and she was second team all year, and I think she should have a chip on her shoulder. She's got

something to prove this year.

Q. Coach, wanted to ask Sophia, for you, to your style, how would you describe your volleyball philosophy, the system we might see instituted at Oregon, and just define success on the court. What do you want that to look like?

TRENT KERSTEN: Yeah, I think in previous years I've come into the season thinking, okay, this is about the system we're going to run. I think this is how it's going to bring out our best for X, Y and Z reason. This year there's so much unknown.

I have worked with two of the players in the gym, three with Maya, and so we're going to have to collaborate together. Maybe it's not like the exact system that I've ran in the past. Maybe it's, hey, how do we get your best and continue to work on maybe running a faster system or a slower system or this or that.

I think the beauty of the season is it's just going to be a really big collaboration with all of our players and discovering, hey, what brings out your best in these situations and how can we talk about it and get on the same page as fast as we can.

Q. What is something your team has improved on over the off-season?

TRENT KERSTEN: So we haven't had a traditional spring season where we've had everyone in the gym working together and working on skills. We had one person in the gym and then we also trained Noemie Glover and Colby Neal, who are going to other institutions.

So super excited because we wanted to treat them like alumni, like they were a part of the Duck family. They did some great things in the past. But really it was so much about service, even developing that skill for Maya. We have one returner coming back and we just hammered serve-receive for the couple months that we could train in the spring.

Again, not a traditional spring season for us. It'll be a lot easier answering that question next year. But super excited about the work that Maya put in and how much better she got.

Q. What are your intentions when you're coaching your players?

TRENT KERSTEN: Yeah, I think there's a bunch of micro behaviors that happen every day, right, little coaching cues, this or that, check-ins, how you doing. But I want to



speaking more globally. I want to speak when we're playing our last home game in Matthew Knight this year and 'Phia and Cora are walking across the court for senior night. I'm missing one -- and Maya.

Like do I have the peace of mind in knowing that I helped them believe in themselves. Have I impacted the way they believe in themselves. If I can have that, then I can have peace of mind in knowing that we had a successful season.

Q. Trent, do you look much at last year's film when you only have one returner, and if you do, any kind of takeaways from Mimi Colyer? I realize you were never at Oregon at the same time as her, but any insights from what you've seen on tape?

TRENT KERSTEN: Yeah, number one, gosh, what a career she's put together. So excited for her and her next step. Can't wait to compete with her on the same court. I think they're coming back to Matthew Knight this year.

I hope our Duck fans welcome her with just a warm greeting because of what she's accomplished within our program.

I'm not someone that comes into a program and tries to slap my name on it and say, hey, this is the Trent Kersten era. I think my job is more to be a bridge of everything this program has done and accomplished in the past. The Final Fours, the Elite Eights, like what Matt did and Chid did here at Oregon is special, and hopefully we have the ability to continue to do that and build that, and that's year one for us.

Q. Trent, you mentioned a lot of the changes going on in volleyball. Now revenue sharing is part of it. How do you make your case to your administration to be part of that and receive some of the revenue sharing dollars?

TRENT KERSTEN: Yeah, I try not to go in and ask the question without earning it. One of my first questions to our ticketing is how have our ticket sales been over the past five years, how do we increase our revenue that we're generating as a program, how do we get more fans, how do we have more of a presence on social media.

Like all those things. I try and focus on the process a lot and say, hey, going into year two, this is how we've grown in a year, and see how the conversation goes with our administration. They're navigating a ton, and I've been so grateful to be a part of the vision of Rob and Lisa and Val and really just excited to be a part of this era. I think there's no better time to be playing college volleyball than

right now with the opportunities that are here.

SOPHIA MEYERS: I think being my last year in college volleyball, being at a place that is big on NIL and has a big fan base, I think it's just really cool to take advantage of those opportunities and how we can build the program even more as players. So I just think it's really cool to be a part of.

Q. You hired Giovana Melo away from Cal State Bakersfield to come be with you. Obviously you had a relationship from playing and knowing each other, but how importing is it for you to have a head coach on your staff?

TRENT KERSTEN: Yeah, she brings so much experience. People that have made a tough place good stand out in my book. So she made Bakersfield really good for 11 years and competitive.

Super grateful to be able to collaborate with her and learn how she sees the game, how we can work together.

The other side of it was she was an international player. She came from Brazil, she went to Nebraska Community College, finished her career at ASU and a lot of our team was going to be international. So really wanted that perspective on our staff so I could learn how to navigate it with as much grace as I could.

I think there's so much good things about Gio and what she brings to the office every day. She's just excited to be there, fired up to work. She's not scared of working hard. I'm excited for our team to look up to her and help guide them in their process.

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