

Big Ten Volleyball Media Days

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Chicago, Illinois, USA

USC Trojans

Coach Brad Keller

Adonia Faumuina

Leah Ford

Press Conference



should be doing on the other side of the net, so we don't really have to talk about it. We're just going to work on those things.

LEAH FORD: Like Brad said, the play is different moving from Pac-12 to Big Ten, definitely more competitive, bigger crowds. But having a year of experience now, I think we're great and we loved it and really enjoyed it.

The travel aspect, we got that down. It wasn't too big of a deal for us. It wasn't like a factor that affected us.

ADONIA FAUMUINA: Yeah, last year we were excited to go into something new, and I think we're ready this year, and going into different places like Penn State, Minnesota, yeah, just really excited for this level of play that's about to come this next month.

BRAD KELLER: We're a very different team too now.

BRAD KELLER: Hi, everybody. How we doing? How many have you done so far? Four? We're No. 4. Sounds good. First, this is my second time doing this, so I'm a little bit more comfortable than last year. I still want to make sure you guys understand how grateful we are to be here.

This is better than last year. It's even more efficient, and this is their first time, and we're probably going to talk about it afterwards, but I can tell you that Allie and Mia were blown away last year. Can't thank you guys enough. We're so excited to be a part of the Big Ten.

With that, I'll turn it over. Let's get going here.

Q. This is year two for USC in the Big Ten. How does that year of experience help how you guys scheme and strategize for this upcoming year two?

BRAD KELLER: Last year I said we didn't know what we didn't know. Now we know what we know. We studied a lot of these teams. We got to play them. There are a lot of different styles. How we're going to play, we're going to change as well.

We have to keep adapting and keep pushing our tempo and play faster, more physical and smarter in a lot of ways, which I think will allow us to bleed points out of opponents hopefully is the way I look at it.

The game has changed drastically in the world, so we have to keep up with that style and how they play and what they do and how they talk and act.

The teams are very, very different across the board, so it's just going to be more about what we do in our gym to prep for them, and then obviously you're scouting and doing other things.

But a lot of the stuff that we need to train is what they

Q. Brad, impact freshmen?

BRAD KELLER: We have a lot of really good freshmen that are coming in. I would say names to watch out for would be Abigail Mullen, Reese Messer, Taylor Deckert, Quinn Loper just to name a few. We also have a young lady named Brooklyn Tealer who registered last year, so she's actually a freshmen but no one saw her because she was injured.

She is no longer injured -- knock on wood -- and we're ready to go. There are 11 returning players, don't get me wrong, but there's a lot of new fresh faces. This is going to be a much younger team.

Q. For both players, can you tell me something that you think is either interesting, funny, insightful, helped your volleyball career that you've learned from Brad?

LEAH FORD: Lots of things from Brad. Brad loves to go off into his things and tell his stories.

I don't know, maybe -- he loves to play games, like I was saying before. He loves to play Connect Four, and we use that as a way to warm up sometimes.



ADONIA FAUMUINA: He likes to open up our practices with a quote or a video. He claims that he's on social media, but he shows us videos, like inspiring videos and inspiring quotes. My favorite quote from him was my freshman year, often bumpy roads lead to beautiful places.

Q. Coach, what is the story behind Connect Four? Any reason?

BRAD KELLER: Well, it's a great game. I grew up competing in everything, so Sequence is a board game -- any sort of way that you can compete I think is important. It also allows you to get one-on-one time with the athletes or you get four people in there with Sequence. Just time the talk and break down walls and teach them.

You can learn a lot from simple games. Like Connect Four -- the thing with Connect Four is it's actually a very intriguing game because you've got to figure out how to divide the thing up and how to get to higher ground and try to cut them off but then build. It's almost like a chess game in reality if you play it correctly.

Same thing with Sequence. It's about patterns and trying to create patterns and stuff. All that stuff translates to sports and volleyball and what your mindset is. If you know what you're doing ahead of time and you know how to get there, you're playing a different game during the volleyball match or what have you.

And so a lot of the stuff that I'm really incorporating now is how do you become an elite thinker, an elite mind.

So I'll give you one real quick story. I'll try to make it fast. There's a video out there that's Barry Bonds versus Greg Maddux. You guys can look it up. They're talking about a bat, Barry Bonds versus Greg Maddux, and they're both not in the same room and they have an iPad, they're watching it, and they're saying the exact same thing.

The level of conversation that they're saying is so elite. It's not trying to get bat on ball. It was like, he has to go down and away. It has to be a cutter. I'm going to sit on it. Have to go down and away. He knows -- I mean, they're saying -- it's just a different level, which is why they were so good.

So I think a lot of what we're trying to do in our gym is find different and creative ways to teach us how to become elite.

Q. Coach, maybe I was the only one who didn't know this, but Coach Trent Kersten came in here and said that you had coached him in the past. Is there anything you want to share about that background and

now seeing him take that step from his time in Southern California to now being a Big Ten coach?

BRAD KELLER: I'm so proud of Trent. Trent is one of my good friends. He was a sophomore when I got this associate job at UCLA on the men's side and he was the first player I talked to. Speraw was I think in Europe competing with the national team at that point, and he just was an ultimate team player.

He was totally a volleyball dork, which I like, and he was sincere, passionate, consistent, which he is now, and I just think he's going to do an amazing job there at Oregon.

I have so many great stories. He was up in Northern California. I went home during COVID, which is up there. He was at San Jose State but he would come over and hang out with the family because you couldn't hang out with very many people. We played a lot of Sequence actually.

Q. Adonia, you've experienced injury in your career. Had a really solid season last year. What are you feeling heading into this year coming off of that foundation that you built and your second year in the Big Ten?

ADONIA FAUMUINA: Yeah, coming from injury, it was really tough, and coming into my first actual full season last year, I was kind of nerve-racking. I was just trying not to injure myself again. I think I just had the best support system around me, especially the seniors and then my girl Leah and Riley McGinest.

Just having them by my side and my family as well, that just really set the foundation for me, and I'm excited to use that going forward into this season. Yeah, really looking forward to it.

Q. Just speaking of your family, what is the impact they've had on you? I understand both your parents were volleyball coaches and how that influenced your upbringing and your volleyball career on and off the court.

ADONIA FAUMUINA: Yeah, so right out of the womb I was in the gym. My dad was a coach. My entire family played. My grandparents, they played in like a little Samoan league in Carson, California. It's like 20 minutes away from LA.

I just runs deep in the Polynesian culture, and it just means everything to me to be able to be at home and play for the people that paved the way for me.



Q. The coaches picked you sixth. Good assessment of your team?

BRAD KELLER: I have no idea. I think we can be anywhere from a top couple team to bottom depending on how it is. This league is incredibly difficult, and I think there's a lot of unknowns. There's a lot of new players in this conference that we don't really know about.

Sixth is fine, but our goal is to try to get to one. That's just the bottom -- we said this in the other live thing is if you're not trying to compete for championships, then that's the only thing I want to be talking about.

Sure, sixth is good right now, but that's not where I want to end up or where we want to end up.

Q. Have you paid attention at all to the evolving world of college athletics with now revenue sharing, now that that's kind of evolved? Is that on your radar and how much thought and consideration do you give to that?

LEAH FORD: For sure it's becoming a big part of women's sports, and I think it's a great avenue, great connections in NIL, revenue sharing. I think it's great for us to be able to put ourselves out there and represent ourselves and be ourselves. Yeah, I think it's great.

ADONIA FAUMUINA: I think it's kind of cool to be able to brand yourself and represent yourself in the world and just basically show who you are and then you get to make money off of it, and it gets to waterfall into your life.

Q. Brad, how much of your mind capacity does that take up in your world to figure out how to navigate, do revenue sharing, argue for more funds to pay the players correctly? How much of that is taking in your day?

BRAD KELLER: It takes the majority of my day now. I've become a manager. You're trying to fill up every kid's basket as best you can.

There's a lot to that, and it's not just volleyball anymore, and it's not just -- it's all these different components. It used to be you're recruiting, you're training, culture, there's certain things, but now you're adding a whole 'nother level of agents and rev share and NIL opportunities and what does that look like.

Honestly, one of the biggest things that we need to do is I'd like to get away from getting your bag or whatever. You get an NIL deal. This needs to be about brand building.

For example, you all know who Ju-Ju Watkins is from our

women's basketball team. Do you think that State Farm is going to drop her after college? She's going to have State Farm for a very long time. So she's building brands, building her brand. I think we need to really change the dialogue of that and work towards what that looks like.

Then on top of that, we need to figure out how to put guardrails in there, too, so we're not all over the place. It's chaos right now. You're navigating chaos and you're navigating what you can do the best way for your kids, and you're trying to make sure that your dialogue is correct towards your kids and the fact that hey, this is a bigger thing, you're trying to build a brand, you're not just trying to grab some money and you're done.

Q. Coach, I wanted to ask you about Leah sitting next to you who became one of the best blockers in the Big Ten. Where do you feel like she can continue to make strides and how she's continuing to grow her game?

BRAD KELLER: Well, at the beginning, Leah wasn't -- she wasn't as strong as she is now. She's really developed herself, put time into the weight room and taking care of herself on and off the court. I think that's a huge one, having the ability to do that for long stretches. That's for any athlete.

Same thing with 'Don. I think we're trained in a very specific way in how you attack the ball and how you find spaces and how you speed things up, how you slow it down, how you become a complete player. Her blocking has actually always been good. She's always been able to get her feet there.

But for her the next step is how high she can get above the net. If you make that move, you get beat, she's still going to be able to close it, but how high above the net can you get to make that play. I think that's going to be the next step for her.

Q. Leah, what has the work been like in this off-season when you do have that solid base of your first year in the Big Ten but trying to move yourself forward too?

LEAH FORD: Yeah, definitely like he said, putting in the work for rehab, putting the work in the weight room, getting my offense more, being more available, more shots. Like he said, just being more creative in the things that I can do and just expanding.

Q. Coach, you mentioned earlier when you were talking about the landscape of the Big Ten and those preseason rankings. How do you look overall from a macro level of the league where there's a lot of fifth

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

years that are no longer here and new head coaches coming in. Does this feel like a transition time? How do you voice what that looks like coming into this season?

BRAD KELLER: The amount of change that's been going on has been pretty extreme. You're right, you have a bunch of fifth-year kids that we've seen for a long time, like Mia Tuaniga was one of them, and Ally Batenhorst, and the list goes down now you're going to get a lot of fresh faces and transfers and international players.

I just think we're in this space where you're going to constantly see movement, and I believe that the teams that do really well down the road over the course of time are going to really invest in their culture and really -- that's going to be the backbone of what they do. So they'll avoid a little bit of the transfer market, whatever that is.

We have to find better ways to continue to take care of ourselves and our teams. I don't know that that really answers your question, but I just think it's just changed so much, and I don't think it's -- I think it's going to continue to change.

On a macro level, it's happening to every conference. There's so many -- there's so many different players that have moved around and different teams popping up and new coaches. I like the fact there's a lot of really good young coaches. There's a lot of really good coaches in the Big Ten. These new coaches are very, very good. This is going to be a very competitive environment, as always.

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