

Big Ten Volleyball Media Days

Tuesday, July 29, 2025

Chicago, Illinois, USA

Wisconsin Badgers

Coach Kelly Sheffield

Carter Booth

Mimi Colyer

Press Conference



KELLY SHEFFIELD: Thank you for having us here today. I think the Big Ten conference and BTN continues to raise the bar on how this event is going. We're really appreciative, and certainly hopefully you feel like everybody is leaning into this because it's really important for our sport, and it just shows how important this sport is to the people that are involved in putting us on TV.

We're happy to be here.

Volleyball is changing a lot. College sports is changing a lot. But one thing that doesn't change is the players and what they're trying to do and what they're trying to accomplish. That pretty much stays the same.

We graduated a lot of players and a lot of talented players, but we've got a lot of talented players coming back and coming in that I'm certainly excited about.

We start our team meetings tomorrow and we start practice the following day. Here we are, right in front of it, and happy to have two elite representatives of our program and university here with Mimi and Carter.

We'll take questions.

Q. Kelly, kind of curious your thoughts on a couple of national things of the sport. First of all, moving the practice up a week, your thoughts on that, and also the Division II management council, I believe it was, had the recommendation of moving to five years. Is that something you'd eventually want to see at the Division I level?

KELLY SHEFFIELD: Yeah, this has been a great -- for us to be able to start earlier is really big.

I'll be honest; I think it handcuffs our sport that we're not able to have access to our players in the summer like other

sports to. I think not only being able to train, but I can't -- our program can't even post anything about them working out. These guys are in the gym or in the weight room working out. You see other sports that are able to post that and promote their sports, and the impact that that has on NIL and just -- we haven't gotten to the part in our sport where we're able to be out there 365. We have these quiet periods, the opening of our tournament where we're not nationally broadcast, and we've got times in the summer where other sports are able to have access with their players and promote their teams and their players. We can't do that.

If they're wanting to promote themselves and what they're doing, they've got to do it themselves. Our school can't do it.

I think that's a tough thing.

But getting a little bit of extra practice here, I think the science will say that that's better for us. We're certainly happy about that.

Five years, I think it would be great. I think that would have a bigger impact if we had five years to play five years across the board. That would impact way more people than NIL does. You know, of every player being able to basically leave with a free graduate leave would be amazing.

You see all these lawsuits that are happening. The lawsuit this I that I would be the most winnable would be from a Title IX standpoint of how are football players able to have basically able to have a third of their season where they're able to play and then still redshirt.

Where if our players play one match, they've lost their year. How is that allowed from a Title IX perspective that you've got over 100 male athletes that are being able to get not only that head start but also being able to build a brand with NIL. Now that you've got money in there, that seems to be the most winnable lawsuit there is.

Q. With losing Grace Lopez, curious how you've seen other people fill the void and how you fill that where it

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seems like she was going to come in and have a pretty big role until that injury.

KELLY SHEFFIELD: Man, we were so excited to get Grace Lopez when she transferred in here. But injuries are certainly a part of it, unfortunately. That's why you have a team. That's why you have depth.

I thought this spring, Madison Quest went over and played the other pin. It's what we try to have. We try to have players that are willing to do anything and everything for the team. I thought Julia Orzol was a great example of that that just finished up her career with us, being able to go from outside to libero, back to outside.

Madison is certainly one of those types of players that are willing to get outside of her comfort zone for whatever is good for the team.

We've got some other players this I think are going to be candidates for that opposite. I think freshman Natalie Wardlow is certainly going to get a look. She played some right side this club season.

I could see a player like Grace Egan maybe getting to take a look over there and how fast her arm is.

That's one I'm excited about going is trying to put these pieces together.

Q. When you've got a young roster, how helpful is it to have core in terms of Mimi, Carter, Charlie to build off of it, those three positions?

KELLY SHEFFIELD: I think the two of them, Mimi and Carter, are two the most experienced players in the league. They're two of the absolute best players at their position in the country.

They are competitive. They've got big dreams, big goals, and they're willing to work for them. They're tough. There's a resiliency about them. They represent our university in a way they conduct their business off the courts very, very well.

When you have new players that are coming in, and you say, you want to be late, this is how you do it, this is how you go about things, this is how you treat other people, this is how you handle adversity. Who's better than the two of them?

Certainly excited to see both of them move into leadership roles for us.

Q. I did the math about the number of kills from last

year that is no longer on your team with the graduation of players. It's 1,400. You just talked about constructing a roster. How exciting is it for you as a head coach, and what do you like most about getting to retool a roster, basically?

KELLY SHEFFIELD: I don't think as a coach you love one more than the other. I think they're just excitement and anticipation for something that is new. Last year going in with a lot of experienced players, I was certainly excited for them and for that team and wanting to be my best for them.

That doesn't change. Their sacrifices, what they're willing to do, what they're trying to accomplish. The people might change, but what they're trying to do isn't, doesn't change at all.

You want to be around good humans. You want to be around people that are willing to be beyond themselves. That's becoming harder and harder in the transfer/NIL world, revenue sharing world is to get people to think beyond themselves and try to elevate others, and when you have those players that are wired like that, man, there's nothing better as a coach.

I feel like we've got that. But we haven't seen adversity yet. We've got a lot of new people. It's not about how well they get along right now, it's how well they work through the tough times together.

Q. Mimi, a year ago you probably didn't expect this late career switch. What's it been like, and part of it's probably got to be very invigorating?

MIMI COLYER: Yeah, it has been so exciting making this huge move. The fact that I'm in Wisconsin is still kind of funny. I'm from California. My mom always said I had to stay on the West Coast for school just so she could come visit, so the fact that I'm in the Midwest is kind of bizarre.

But it's been so much fun. There's been so much learning over the last couple months just growing and really bonding with the team and these girls. There's a lot of new girls, so it's been really fun just bonding as a team, bonding as teammates on the court, and it's been awesome.

Q. Carter, you've been in pro sports like your whole life, through osmosis if nothing else. Are you looking at the new world a little bit like a general manager? Is there part of you looking at it from a business sense because of pro sports?

CARTER BOOTH: I mean, I think it would be naïve to not explore the business side of things. With my team now, we are a family. Like there is love for the game and there's



love for each other involved, and I think now as we move into this new world and things develop it is becoming a little bit more of a business but the focus is always to win, to get better, to play for my team and the people around me.

If I have to sort of put on different hats, I'm able to do that. But I think one thing that's for sure is I never allow the business side to bleed into what's most important, which is teammateship and camaraderie and focusing on winning and going out there and doing our best.

Q. Mimi, with the House settlement, how much is that on your radar? Is that something you're learning about? What's your approach to that?

MIMI COLYER: I mean, yeah, that's not -- was not on my list of priorities when looking at schools to come to. I got on the phone with Kelly and we talked about the Wisconsin and the history of it. When you say Wisconsin volleyball people know what that means.

I've been excited to get in here and be a part of that program and just really lean into the historic greatness that this program is. But yes, that hasn't been a huge factor at all.

Q. Carter, being one of the few holdovers that played a lot, what's been your role in integrating all the new faces and new teammates?

CARTER BOOTH: I think my role has just been being the voice of reason a little bit, when I see something, say something. People want to do well, we want to do well, we want to follow rules and it's hard to know how to do it when you don't know where you stand.

So being the person that's experienced things and been through things and I know kind of how it works it's taken it upon myself to be a little bit of a heavier guiding hand now so when we get into season I can be more hands off. And I said this earlier on TV, I'd rather be irritating than have people not know what's going on.

If it means I have to overcommunicate and sometimes be a little bit bossy, I'm more than happy doing that if it's what's best for the team.

Q. Carter, you have one of the biggest fan bases in sports. What is it like playing in front of the Badgers, and Mimi, what has been your experience thus far since you've been there with the fans?

CARTER BOOTH: I think playing in front of our fans is always a memorable experience. I feel like every single memory we make on the court is a core memory just

because they are so enthusiastic and they love the sport. They just love the sport and they love supporting us as female athletes, and they know how to get loud.

I think that it's just always so inspiring and humbling to see just how much people look up to us. It really reminds you of what matters most and what we're here for.

MIMI COLYER: Yeah, this fan base is probably the reason why I wanted to come to Wisconsin. I had played here twice in my career before deciding to transfer, and I'll tell the story over and over about how as soon as those doors opened people came flooding in, like literally sprinting into the crowd. The general admissions section filled up in seconds but still like an hour for the game. These fans are just so passionate about supporting us and they just love the sport of volleyball and like she said, supporting us as female student-athletes. It's so incredible and it's like nowhere else.

Q. Carter, how have you seen this team grow since that loss last year at Nebraska? And for Mimi, looking at the program, not just fan base but as a whole, what were your impressions of Kelly's program before you got here, and what's been your impressions now that you've been here for a little bit?

CARTER BOOTH: I mean, I think in terms of growth -- I mean, again, we turned over a lot of people. We have, I'd say, 70 percent new team. So I think there's -- we're starting from ground zero. It's about understanding that and then getting on the same page as quick as possible. I think personally my areas of growth have been the leadership aspect. I think I've been consistently good on the court, and for me this past spring and summer has been about being good for my team off the court as well.

Like I said, when I see something, say something, using my voice, getting used to speaking up. Me and Kelly, we had a meeting before we even started spring. His note for me was I'd love to see you use your voice more, because I think what you have to say is always thoughtful and impactful.

So just coming into my own a little bit more with that has been, I think, the biggest area of growth.

MIMI COLYER: Yeah, I think my impression of Wisconsin volleyball is kind of like I said earlier, you say Wisconsin volleyball and people know what you're talking about, even if they're not super familiar with the sport or even the state of Wisconsin. Wisconsin volleyball means something, and as an outsider looking in, that had always been my impression.

Then getting here, I think I learned the reason, the work that goes in behind the scenes is insane between the players themselves. You go into the gym and there's always someone doing extra reps or the coaching staff, if I have a question about something, here is a five-slide PowerPoint she put together in 20 seconds to show clip by clip of how I need to do something better.

There is just so much work that goes in behind the scenes in all aspects of it, and that's why it's known for what it is.

Q. Who are some of the younger players who have really stood out to you in the off-season?

MIMI COLYER: I'm really excited for both of those 'beros, Kristen Simon and Aniya Warren. They're gym rats. They're in there all the time. You go in there, you ask if someone wants to go do passing reps, they are always the first ones to say yes. I'm really excited to watch them compete for that lib spot, just watch them compete.

They so fun to play next to. They're so energetic and they're really fun to get to be around.

CARTER BOOTH: Yeah, what she said.

Q. The coaching staff is a little bit different with Lauren Carlini becoming an assistant coach, and I'm interested on that, John Shondell as well, and then Gary White's role, player of personnel and analytics. Can you talk a little bit about that role and what that entails and some of the changes on the staff too?

KELLY SHEFFIELD: Yeah, Annemarie Hickey decided to move full time into the pro, which we're really excited about her to do.

I felt like last year there was a lot of things that I was handling that I felt took me away from our players. The changing of what is happening in college athletics and being on top of that, with revenue sharing, with NIL, because it's not just -- there's a lot of, well, what if I do this or what if we do this or what if we do this, and a lot of brainstorming.

The more that you're spending on things that aren't volleyball or not your people, for me it's a mistake, I feel like.

Gary took over that director of player personnel. Also stats will fall under him. We are moving Lauren Carlini into a coaching role, which I think is a really big deal for all of our players. She's got so much to offer, not only because she's been where they want to go, but she is passionate. She's got a work ethic that there's just so much to tap into,

and being able to get her more involved was certainly a goal.

Then the opportunity of bringing in John who I've known for over 40 years and who is one of the best trainers in our sport, to be able to bring him in, again, he'll be an amazing fit for our staff. And I think our players, once they get to know him, because he's only been around for a week, I think he'll be able to benefit them.

We're excited about the changes and what we've got this year.

Q. Mimi, is Carter as obnoxious as she says she is?

CARTER BOOTH: When did I say that?

Q. Well, irritating was the word.

MIMI COLYER: She's a voice of reason. It's nice because I think both of us are growing into our own leadership roles and our types of leadership, but I think where she is more likely to say it out loud and she's much more of a vocal leader than I am. I think I am a more of a lead by example, but I think we balance each other out pretty well.

CARTER BOOTH: Yeah, we definitely do.

Q. Kelly, how did you in the coaches' poll pick the top five on your ballot?

KELLY SHEFFIELD: Did I vote?

MIMI COLYER: What was your Top 5?

KELLY SHEFFIELD: What was my Top 5 in the country or in the Big Ten? You want me to say who was my Top 5? Well, it's hard to go against the teams that were -- that finished up there last year, so I went Nebraska 1, I went Penn State 2, went us 3. Who was 4? I might have gone UCLA and Minnesota, but I'm not sure -- I don't recall which order I had those two in. Those are probably my top five. Have most people ducked that question?

Q. No, just you.

KELLY SHEFFIELD: Just me.

Q. Kelly, you had three people play, wear the libero jersey last year. What does the outlook of that position with a fresh group of liberos look like this year?

KELLY SHEFFIELD: Yeah, it'll be somebody new, obviously. We've got four players that I would say that are

a candidate for that. Jada Cerniglia transferred in here. We're excited to have her and her experience in there. Maile Chan is coming back for a second year, and excited about that. We've got two very talented freshmen that are going to have the ability to get in there in Simon and Warren.

It's been a -- one of the things that has jumped -- think of how many elite freshmen have come in in this conference and been ready to play at a high level. Certainly we've had freshmen that have come in and played at a really high level. My goodness, what school hasn't.

I think the experiences out of these players are going through with club and with their USA stuff that a lot of these guys are doing, the Under Armour stuff, they're coming in and playing really big stages and they've got a lot of confidence, and they're probably more prepared to handle the speed of the game than maybe a lot of the younger players were 10 years ago or whatever.

I'm excited about seeing that battle. It's pretty obvious that playing time isn't guaranteed for anybody, but it's really hard to not see these two out on the court. But there's some positions that there's opportunity. That's seeing who grabs on to that and who's able to bring it day after day after day and be somebody that a teammate can be counted on in big moments that wants to be in those big moments.

Learning that and finding out about that, that's one of the joys that we'll find out here starting in a couple days.

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