

# 2022 NCAA Women's Volleyball Championship

Wednesday, December 14, 2022

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

CHI Health Center Arena

## San Diego Toreros

## Coach Jennifer Petrie

## Gabby Blossom

## Katie Lukes

### Press Conference



**goes on in the Final Four in Omaha?**

GABBY BLOSSOM: This is actually my first Final Four. This is like a whole new experience for me.

The COVID year I think was just so different. We were in a bubble. Everything was really different. So this is a whole new experience and I'm so glad I get to experience it with the staff and this team.

**Q. Jen, specifically what do you and your assistants have for assignments and division of labor? Who does what -- practice, formulating the season and actual match prep?**

COACH PETRIE: It's really very collaborative. Alfi and I do a lot of practice planning, discussing training, drill preparation. Jimmy and Alfi do a lot of the statistical breakdown of what to expect in the scouting and those terms. A lot of the scouting videos are done through Jimmy and Alfi.

As far as culture work, the three of us all work very closely in creating vision and certainly our pillars and our foundation of the program. That was a lot of war-room time for our staff. We spend a lot of hours together creating verbiage and language and how we were going to operate this team this year knowing that we were going to have something special.

**Q. For example, Jerritt says specifically he has an offensive coordinator and defensive coordinator. Do you do that -- take that a step farther?**

COACH PETRIE: I'll take it further. There's three of us. We have to be the coordinators of everything. Obviously Alfi does a tremendous job training a lot of our positions and he'll work with setters specifically, will get in the gym and do a lot of work with Gabby and our other setters.

But after that, you know, we will break up and he and I will do a lot of the offensive work together. I think blocking would be a big part for him. But when we go into practice, we'll split up positions and it will be a rotation.

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by San Diego head coach Jennifer Petrie and student-athletes Gabby Blossom and Katie Lukes.

COACH PETRIE: Such an awesome experience for us to be here at the Final Four. And joined with some really tremendous competitors and two of which we've got to play this past season, which is really exciting for us. We're thrilled to be here. We're excited to get out on the court and compete. And continue this miraculous season we're having.

**Q. Gabby, I assume sitting there, this is the reason you did what you did?**

GABBY BLOSSOM: Absolutely, I think I got so lucky. Someone asked today, is this what you expected. And it exceeded every possible expectation I could have had.

**Q. Katie, being here in Omaha, Nebraska is not here, there's not any Big Ten teams here. Why should the fans rally around your team?**

KATIE LUKES: You know, I think we have stood by our statement, why not us all year. And we really, really proved it. You can see in the way we play. We really just love the sport and love each other. I think we're really fun to watch because we show a lot of joy when we play.

I know people like to call us the underdog but I think we've earned our spot here. We deserve to be here and we're really fun to watch.

**Q. Gabby, you played here a couple years ago during the spring, the spring tournament here. Does that provided any experience or helped you know what**



Sometimes we'll have part of the staff with offense and middles. And sometimes Jimmy will be off with middle blockers working on footwork.

So my staff is tremendous in the fact we can be hands-on in a lot of different areas. And we have to wear a lot of different hats, because it's the three of us. That's it. There's no other technical coordinator. There's no other DOVO. So when I say we rotate hats, we do a lot of things. And we extract a lot from each other.

**Q. Wanted to ask a little bit about the fact that there's no Big Ten team here. There's no Pac-12 team here. Obviously you were one of the teams that kept the Pac-12 out. What that says about the growth of the sport to have this Final Four. And my second question is, and I asked Coach Busboom Kelly, this is just the second time to have two women head coaches at the Final Four. And she said that being a mom has made it mean so much to her. And you're also a mom. Could you talk about those two things?**

COACH PETRIE: The parity. Yes, I think this season more than ever, the depth and strength of the competitive teams across the country and across conferences has really shown. And that's been a tremendous growth in volleyball right now.

Our conference had four teams in the tournament this year. And that's a testament to what's happening.

RPI-wise, people are getting out there, playing each other. They're not afraid to be challenged regardless what conference you're in. That's certainly been our philosophy all along, to just play as many teams as we can in many different regions, and who we think are going to be challenging us at this point of the year. It was a tremendous year for that.

I'm excited that you mentioned being a mom because I certainly know in my journey that having children has made me a better coach 100 percent. Because I know that these women are somebody's daughter.

And how would I want them to treat my daughter and how I communicate with them, how I treat them is very important. And the nurturing environment that goes between when you come in as a 17-year-old and you leave as a 22-year-old, there's a lot of development there.

And there's a lot that happens off the court in that progression as well as on the court. So certainly I feel that that's been a huge part of my coaching experience.

**Q. Logan Eggleston is the head of that Texas snake.**

**What are your impressions of her as a player and also as a representative of this sport?**

COACH PETRIE: I love her strength and her courage. And I think that she's a tremendous leader for that program. She's a fierce competitor, and she really is the driving force like you said of that program and it's fun to watch her play because she just has so much competitive energy. It will be exciting and a challenge to play against that.

**Q. Gabby, what is it like being the new kid in a program, transferring in after being at Penn State for a number of years, and kind of integrating yourself into the team culture and developing relationships as a center which are probably more important than any other position on the floor?**

GABBY BLOSSOM: We had a couple of transfers. I was lucky I got to come in January and also so lucky this program welcomed me with open arms, from the staff to the players, is really seamless. We had a lot of older kids, like Katie and Annie that have been in this program for so long, just led by example and showed the way and like what the culture of this program was.

So I think I couldn't have been luckier to come to this place and have the people I had around me to help me. And then obviously being a setter, I had to develop relationships and like figure out what people needed.

And then getting here in January was like the key to that. It's something we talked about a lot when I was in the portal, was how early could I get to school here. So, it was, like, if I got to graduate from Penn State and come out here. But all those things are really important. But Jen talked about our culture earlier. That allows people to come into this program and kind of fit in seamlessly.

**Q. I'm not suggesting that you don't coach Gabby, but was there an element of it's not broken don't fix it, you know what you're doing, do your job when she came in?**

COACH PETRIE: I think certainly from the start it was like that. Let's see where we're at and how you can adapt and change and what areas you might be able to do that to fit into what our system will look like. She would probably say that she was challenged a lot and Alfi probably challenged her a lot to make some changes in her game but certainly the crux of who she is and how she plays, that we didn't want to change at all.

**Q. Gabby, maybe some fine points that you might make note of?**



GABBY BLOSSOM: I think the biggest thing I had to change when I got here was getting the ball out of my hands faster. Obviously we run a really fast offense. And Katie can hit at incredible speed. And we wanted to be able to give her the ball she needed. And that meant that I had to get the ball out of my hands faster to fit into this offense.

So there was a lot of grace, I think. I'm so lucky our coaches gave me some time to figure it out because it wasn't the easiest thing. But it worked. Here we are running this offense. So I think that was probably the biggest change and there were small changes obviously in different aspects. But in terms of setting, it was getting the ball out of my hands faster.

**Q. Could you talk about Coach, the fact that she's been so successful for so many years, but you're part of this team to get her to a Final Four. What that's meant to this group? And what are some of the aspects she talked about her coaching philosophy, how does that impact you?**

KATIE LUKES: Like Jen said, she's a second mom to all of us. And I think there's a lot of balance in our program and we really value family and our own families, but just creating a family within our team and finding the joy in volleyball.

A lot of times -- she has an open door policy. We can talk to her about anything and it's a really open program. And we're closer than we've ever been. And I've never felt like -- I feel our program is unique in that way. I'm blessed I was there for five years to be part of that and grow with the team. I knew our vision was great, and we have obviously exceeded our vision this year.

I think Jen is an incredible leader and role model for all of us. I love her a lot. And she's taught us a lot. I just think it's such a unique program in the way she brings us all together in a family aspect.

**Q. How does it feel to finally reach this stage of the tournament? And did any doubt ever creep into your mind that this moment would ever happen?**

COACH PETRIE: It takes a lot to get to this point in any program and for any coach. It's certainly the pinnacle of my career to be here and certainly to be here with this group because it's a vision that we started in January and has come to fruition, which is just phenomenal.

I've never had doubts in my mind that we have been a stellar program. Certainly this has exceeded that, and

we've busted the ceiling on where we've been stuck for quite some time. Sweet 16 several times.

So this season certainly is raising the bar for a lot of teams that are going to come after them, and our hope is that the USD volleyball program is here to stay.

**Q. Do you ever hear from USD alum John Cook on the work you're doing?**

COACH PETRIE: I just heard from John Cook two days ago. I played club for John Cook. He and I have -- I was 15. So it's been a long time, a long relationship. And he's been a mentor to me, certainly, through those years. And I learned a lot at a young age, just observing and seeing how he coached and how he ran very successful club program at the time, which he, I'm sure he parlayed right into a fantastic college program. But, yeah, he said, go for the gold.

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