



2018 MEN'S NATIONAL COLLEGIATE VOLLEYBALL CHAMPIONSHIP PRE-MATCH QUOTES (MAY 2, 2018)

OHIO STATE HEAD COACH PETE HANSON

opening remarks

"Well, it should be an exciting match. Looking forward to playing the No. 1 team in the country and trying to continue our journey to getting to the finals and hopefully playing for another national championship. But, you know, it's going to be a tall challenge for the Buckeyes. Long Beach is obviously a great team and they've kind of been on a mission since last year when we saw them in Columbus. I think our guys will be ready. I know there is no fear in stepping out on the court and playing this team. We just have to do what we normally do and do it to the best of our abilities. I think if we do that we have a chance and that's all we are asking for at this stage in the game."

On what makes Long Beach State such a talented team

"Well let me see. They have the national coach of the year. They have the national assistant coach of the year. They probably have two candidates for the national player of the year and a third one who probably should be in the conversation in Kyle Ensing. But no, it's a great group of guys. A well-coached team. A group who has been together for three years. They probably haven't had quite the success that they have hoped for by this time. I think that they really felt that they were a national championship caliber team last year and they didn't get through that semifinal match. So you can tell that they are a very driven group and that they have something to prove and are trying to make a statement. And that's what makes teams go from good to great. Whether it's a disappointment that starts you on that journey or you are trying to maybe, in our case, hold on to what we've won. But it's just a great collection of players right now. Clearly they are playing for each other and playing for a big, common goal and when you've got that going you can get a lot of great things done."

On the trend of more teams outside of the West Coast contending for national championships

"I think it speaks to the fact that teams are getting a higher level of support across the country whether that's in the form of scholarships or coaching staffs. But I also think the other component that is coming into play is there are now kids who are willing to go to other parts of the country. We have a number of West Coast kids on our team. Irvine had two starts from Chicago and Wisconsin on their team. Kids are just looking at programs where they fit athletically and academically, and that could be somebody from the Pacific Palisades who comes to Ohio State. I think it's just developing a more consistent level of competition across the board. The nice thing is that programs like Loyola (Chicago), Ohio State, Lewis and Penn State, for example, have proven that we have the resources and the support of our university to compete for national championships. Yeah it has been dominated by the West Coast, but I think that was in an era where there wasn't a level of support across the country and I think that has changed for the better. Volleyball, at least on the men's side, is becoming a nation-wide sport where kids can choose to go elsewhere and still be in this situation and that's a good thing."

OHIO STATE JUNIOR MIDDLE BLOCKER BLAKE LEESON

On the winning culture that the upperclassmen have established

"I'd say it started in the last couple years with people like Miles Johnson, Christy Blough and Gabe (Gabriel Domecus). They always set the expectations high and let people beneath him, meaning the underclassmen,

know that this is what we are about. They started off a great tradition. A lot of people buy into that because when things work and you trust your coaches, it's easier to buy into a system or a program. I think we just keep buying in and keep working hard that's all you can ask for at the end of the day."

On the possibility of winning a third national championship in a row

"I can't speak on behalf for the other guys but for me personally, I enjoy being the underdog more than I do being the No. 1 seed as weird as that sounds. In 2016 we had no expectations and I think that allowed us to play more free. We are in that spot now so I like where we are at."

On the pressure that comes with previously being the No. 1 seed

"In 2016 there were no expectations. You just kind of go out there and give it what you got. In 2017, we were expected to win. I think everyone was more tight. For me, it was more of a relief when we won more than an excited feeling. Don't get me wrong, I was excited. But it was more of 'okay, we did what we were supposed to do' versus in 2016 it was like 'Oh my God, we did it.'"

OHIO STATE JUNIOR SETTER SUNIL THOMAS

On making adjustments to face an offensive team like Long Beach State

"I think what's going to be key is the balance throughout the match, not just riding (Nicolas Szerszen) until he goes into the ground. Obviously he's a great player but I can't set him every ball. I wish I could. It's just finding that balance and keeping their other middles honest. Our offense is at its best when everyone is connecting, everyone is getting some balls and everyone is balanced so I think that's going to be key for us."

On the possibility of winning a third national championship in a row

"Honestly I don't think we are thinking that far ahead. We have a tall challenge tomorrow to even get to the championship match. So I don't think we have any pressure to have to repeat. We are just taking it one game at a time and one day at a time. We are fortunate enough that our season has gone this far and we are just going to try our hardest to keep it going."



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LONG BEACH STATE HEAD COACH ALAN KNIPE

opening statement

"Like every team here, we're excited to be here. This is the culmination of a lot of work over the course of the entire season so I know our guys are excited. We know there are some really good teams in this tournament and [the tournament] gets deeper and the quality of play gets better each and every year, as proven by the play-in game last night [between UC Irvine and Ohio State]. We're excited to get after it. Thanks for everything that the NCAA and our hosts here at UCLA have done to make the championships special for the student-athletes."

on the challenges presented by the team's 12-day layoff between matches

"It's part of the deal. If you play the season out and get rewarded with the time off, it's what you want. We prepped for this over the course of the year. We had a bye in the conference tournament as well. It's not like we haven't been playing volleyball. We know we're facing a team that played on Tuesday, and it comes down to 'which do you prefer?' You get a chance to get your legs under you and play on the court a little bit and then it turns into a five-gamer, or you get a break and get to work on some things. We scheduled some things last week to make it more similar to a normal week. We had a really good black-and-gold scrimmage on Friday night with fans, refs, the whole deal, and we did a lot similar things as we would for a normal match: scouting reports, preparation and warm-ups. So it feels for us like we played on Friday night and we have the week to prepare for a two-match week."

on potentially facing programs that have knocked them out of prior NCAA Tournaments

"Well that's getting ahead of ourselves. We're playing Ohio State tomorrow night. We didn't play them, we played BYU in the [2017 NCAA Semifinal]. As far as who, what, where, I don't think a coach here really cares what the order is, the only way to accomplish the goals we have for ourselves is to be here and play the match here we have tomorrow night against a great team that is well-coached and has had success in this tournament. We're fired up and ready to play."

on whether he'd like to see more teams in the NCAA Tournament field

"Absolutely I'd like to see more. For some of the teams we played over the course of the season to not have a chance to compete for the championship is difficult. I've been on both sides of that. There are a handful of teams out there that probably feel like that they could get in this tournament and maybe win it. We want expansion. I think that the best thing that happened with the Big West [Conference] adding men's volleyball was that it did spur some growth. Maybe the MPSF can do something with the Pac-12 or the Big-10. I don't know where it goes, but our sport is growing. I go to the [Junior Olympics] boy's tournament every year, and it's swelling at huge numbers. The quality is there to add teams, and the tournament would not be watered down if we were able to expand. Do we go as big as the women's tournament, probably not, but we could get sizably bigger and the tournament would not lose any of its luster. I'm all about growth, and I love the way we're going

and what's happened the last couple of years from the expansion to six, to the play-in games, and what we've been able to do has been great for the student-athletes."

on opponent Ohio State's Tuesday night contest vs. UC Irvine

"I think that played out how a lot of people thought it would. Those are two very good teams, and two very different teams. It was a slugfest. It didn't surprise me. It wouldn't have been surprised me whichever team won. I think there was the opportunity for Ohio State's serve to get going, and at times it really did and it paid out dividends in the end, but there were a lot of matchup problems that Irvine was able to pose to Ohio State with size in the middle. More importantly, what a great example of the level of men's volleyball right now if that's a play-in game."

LONG BEACH STATE JUNIOR OUTSIDE HITTER TJ DEFALCO

on what it will take to reach the NCAA Championship match

"I think we've used the last few years as a pretty good reference point. The way we practice and what our mindset should be for practices. That's what we've kind of made our mantra for the whole year: just grind, one match at a time and one point at a time. We've had a lot of experience getting to the final four, but we're trying to have the best preparation possible to put ourselves in the best situation for these matches."

on being perceived as the favorites in the tournament

"In my opinion, being the favorite means nothing to us. We were favored last year, and we weren't prepared the way we are now. So it comes down to how we do and the way we prepare."

LONG BEACH STATE JUNIOR SETTER JOSH TUANIGA

on running the team's offense

"We put a lot of work in, both during the fall and during the [regular] season, so we feel pretty confident that all the work that we've put on has gone to good use. That's where the confidence comes from, all the work we've put in."

LONG BEACH STATE SENIOR OUTSIDE HITTER BJARNE HUUS

on the vibe of the team

"It's a great vibe. We know we can rely on each other to do our jobs. The biggest thing is that we want to believe in ourselves. Both setters in the gym, Josh and Carlos [Rivera] are running a balanced offense so everyone gets the chances to prove themselves in practice so coming out in the matches becomes much easier."



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BYU HEAD COACH SHAWN OLMSTEAD

opening statement

"Thanks for coming and we're super excited to be here. Thanks to UCLA for the venue and, thus far, a great event. It was exciting to be a part of some of the matches last night and watch those matches with Irvine, Ohio State, Harvard, UCLA and congrats to the teams that have advanced thus far. More than anything, we're just excited to be here. Really happy for these guys and hope to make it a great tournament, great event."

on dealing with layoff heading into match

"I think we've had the right mindset and I know these guys have, the player, in terms of looking at it as an opportunity for us to get better in practice. And I think we've planned our, since the MPSF Championship a little more than a week ago, I think we've planned accordingly. The mindset these guys have had all season have been constant improvement and I think that we've done that and we wanted to measure a few things and look at some areas we can get better at and we've definitely done that. So that's how we've approached the week. Excited to get going tomorrow."

on what makes UCLA a tough opponent

"It's exciting. UCLA-BYU—that's been a constant now in men's Division I volleyball for a handful of years. It's a great team, a great group of guys. They've got a setter kind of leading their team and I like his leadership, I like the way that he plays the game. He's played a lot of volleyball. They've got good volleyball players everywhere, so they're going to come, they're going to be aggressive from the service line, they're going to go back to score points—we know that. So it's going to be an exciting matchup and we look for another one of those UCLA-BYU volleyball matches. That's what the guys talk about and we're all excited, for sure."

on growth of sport

"Yeah, absolutely.... It is important and you look at what volleyball here in the United States and men's volleyball, specifically, what it's accomplished on the international stage, consistently over so many years. You'd hope that we can continue to pique the interest of young boys to look for that hope and that dream of becoming a collegiate athlete, competing in an NCAA tournament and I think, what we've got to do is continue to push it and see how we can expand this thing. How we can get more opportunities to young men to compete for championships and, to be able to do that, we've kind of got to increase the tournament field, we've got to do all that we can. I'm not the brains behind that and we're all fortunate that that's not the case, but I think there's going to be some important meetings and discussions on how we can get more teams participating, how we can make it a bigger tournament for everybody involved. You look at all these other sports and, I understand Title IX, having coached with women's and now coached with the men's side—I get it, but we do need to do something to be able to expand that tournament as best we can, get more opportunities and do all that we can. Again, there's so many great kids playing volleyball, specifically young men that we could give them the opportunity to compete for the championship, play in a tournament setting, do all they can to grow the sport. And to be able to do that, we're going to have to get more teams and universities involved and hopefully we're pushing that to expand a little more. But we have expanded recently and hope we can continue to do that."

on new Big West conference

“It gave us some opportunity to definitely go play more out-of-conference teams and we were able to do that. You know we had some tough road trips and were able to host teams as well, in Provo. I’ll be honest, at first I understand the growth—the Big West kind of went along and did their thing. They were given that automatic berth to the NCAA, which is great, because then we’re able to expand things a little. But I’m not going to lie, coming from somebody that played in the old MPSF and then coaching in the MPSF, that conference and every match and every battle night in and night out—it was fun to be a part of the battle to MPSF. I’m excited that we’ve been able to acquire that automatic berth, which is kind of something we need to do to be able to expand the tournament, look into that. It just makes scheduling a little more different. We have to be a little more creative because we don’t have those matchups that are in place in the normal conference schedule. We lost almost half, as did the Big West. And so we just have to make sure, it’d be nice if we’re all on the same page in terms of scheduling, trying to get conference to start at for the most part the same time so we can schedule to nonconference on the front end or be on the same page, we can all get out and go play teams from the midwest, back east and all over. That was exciting, we were able [to go] all the way to Muncy. Then we went all the way to places like Hawai’i. Granted, Hawai’i’s been in our conference before. But we’re able to do that now. The budgets are the budgets. We have to be aware of that. It’s exciting. I think it is good for the sports, although, I’m not going to lie, I do miss the old MPSF and those battles that were—because it unfortunately gets a little more difficult to be able to schedule everybody. Obviously, we didn’t play everyone in the Big West. We played as many as we could and tried to get that scheduled. But there could be a matchup here where we’re playing against one of the teams that we haven’t played. We’re not going to get ahead of ourselves, that’s for sure.”

BYU SENIOR SETTER LEO DURKIN

on whether playing team in consecutive matches works to advantage or disadvantage

“It’s UCLA. We’re always excited for an opportunity to have another match against them. We know the guys on that squad, we love playing against them, it’s a good, competitive environment. I think, going into this match, a bunch of us guys are just grateful for the opportunity that we get to have another Final Four appearance. We’re just keeping it that. We’re just going to go out there and play our best ball.”

on what this opportunity means as a senior

“I’m just grateful. It’s the way I’d want it to be. Obviously, you envision going into your last year being able to have an opportunity like this. It’s just everything.”

BYU SENIOR OUTSIDE HITTER BRENDEN SANDER

on what this opportunity means as a senior

“Also, on top of being grateful and stuff, it’s our last year to do this. I have more motivation this year to do it than any other year. Along with that, it’s having fun this year, too, because it’s my last year going out there on the court with my brothers right here. It’s a lot of motivation to go win this and have fun doing it.”

on if anything is added being near his hometown of Huntington Beach, Calif.

“I mean, of course it does with all the fans that come out and support us and family watching. Ultimately, that doesn’t affect me too much, personally. I just like making eye contact with everyone on our team on the court, just playing with them and doing what we do out there.”

BYU SENIOR MIDDLE BLOCKER PRICE JARMAN

on what it means to face UCLA

“UCLA, they have some incredible athletes. I think that’s apparent when you watch them play and their style of play shows that. They’ve got some guys with super-high volleyball IQs who play the game at a really high level. I think this will be like our 10th or 11th time playing them in our career and every single time we’ve played them, it’s been an absolute battle and points don’t come easy. That’s kind of the matchup we expect is two physical teams that aren’t really willing to concede.”



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UCLA HEAD COACH JOHN SPERAW

opening statement

"We're looking forward to another practice today so that we can get a little bit better. We're obviously very familiar with BYU, our opponent, having played them twice in the last month. I think we know a lot about what we need to do, and they probably know a lot about what they need to do. We definitely know that it will be a great match. They're very big and physical and have a great block. They've done a really good job of float serving us. They've scored a lot of points with that serve when we were there for the MPSF finals. Our float serve reception will be a very important part of our win, our hopeful win. As always, serve and pass will be a big part of this match."

on juggling the schedule demands while serving as the Team USA volleyball head coach

"It's pretty striped down, especially now that we're in the fifth year of running the national team. I think that so many of the systems and the infrastructure is put into place. It's pretty automatic. I have a great staff down in Anaheim, and they have handled just about everything during the offseason whether that's communicating with athletes or scheduling for the summer, planning for upcoming training. Now, we are starting to see an influx of athletes as their professional seasons now are getting dependent upon how they've done in the playoffs, so players are coming in, how we manage their volume as we give them recovery time and they're gearing back up. I don't think that I've had one conversation with them this week. I'm not even sure if I had a conversation with them last week. All that is pretty autonomous down there, and in terms of your reference to everybody that's here and the convention aspect of it, I think that's true. I have received a number of texts from people that want to talk, you know, and I've been politely deferring that except for a couple special cases. It's fun to see everybody and it's great that everybody is coming to see this match here in L.A. It's a wonderful experience for everybody involved in the men's game to come together and see this event, particularly here in Pauley."

on UCLA trying to capture its first NCAA title since 2006

"I think that it's really not that different than what we ask our athletes to do. We ask our athletes to try and not see big picture, but to stay in the present and to play one point at a time volleyball is very cliché, but I think it's a good cliché. I think for me, it rolls through my brain and then I quickly put it out. I don't expect our athletes to be perfect and play one point volleyball. They're going to hit a ball out of bounds, and they're going to go 'Darn it.' You know, and then they'll have to get back to that moment, and I think that's kind of how I'm treating the history here and the hopes of the alumni and the expectation of the university, where we've been so good, historically. I was a part of that. I want to be a part of that, and I want to bring that back. That's certainly a mission of mine. We've talked about it. We're here to win. At the same time, I also have to understand that I have to be process-minded, too, and I have to play my own one-point game as the leader of this organization. So for me, I have to understand that yeah I want to win and I've thought about it and yeah I look up at that banner and think, 'Darn, it's been a long time since there's been a number up there,' and then I think that I've got to run a great practice today. I have to run a great team meeting. I've got to plan a great gameplan. I've got

to communicate with my athletes. I've got to do the best that I can do with the best that I have in front of me in this moment, and if I do that, then those numbers will come back."

on how he keeps his team fresh as they prepare for upcoming matches

"I think that the conversation about keeping people fresh is a constant dialogue between the staff, strength and conditioning and the trainers. We had a bye week a couple of weeks ago, and the truth is this team still has some things to get better at today. We're very much a continued work in progress. So we had a week off, and the message that I was getting from the players is that when we played Stanford University, we were tired because we'd had that week to train. I was like, 'Ooh, a week, let's go.' And I think that we fatigued them a little bit, and so when we had this other bye week, we talked a lot about how that week would look, based upon what we had learned from the week prior. I think we've done a good job of understanding what we needed to get in, of what the priorities were for the areas of focus and training, and how to do that in a period of time that allowed them to get better and still keep them fresh."

UCLA JUNIOR SETTER MICAH MA'A

on how he balances keeping the hot hand as a setter while trying to keep the defense guessing

"That's actually a really good question because we have a lot of guys who come from a past history of getting every ball and kind of being the guy or being able to have a rhythm. It kind of gets thrown off when you come here, because all of these guys can go out and change the game on any given night. It's almost more of an adjustment on their part than mine. For me, I'm still setting a bunch of guys who can put the ball away. It's really nice. It's a pleasure. But I'd say that it's maybe tougher on them to get one ball here or one ball there instead of every ball that they got on their club team or high school team. So, maybe that's a better question for Dylan, I'm not sure. But I just try and do my own thing and hope that they can put away the balls that I give them."

UCLA JUNIOR OUTSIDE HITTER DYLAN MISSRY

on the UCLA men's volleyball program having not won the NCAA title since 2006

"Obviously we want to win, and to do it here would be pretty awesome. But I don't think that any of us really dwell on that, since we haven't won since 2006. I mean, I was nine years old. That was a long time ago. That's not anything in my head that we're trying to get over the hump. We just focus, really, on our upcoming opponent and doing what we can, not that we need to do something for this university. We want to do it for each other, and of course for the university as a whole. I think that it's really about us. We're not thinking like we need to win this year, or something like that. We're just doing everything that we can, right now, to be at our best."