

**2014 EIVA Men's Volleyball
SEMIFINAL #2
Penn State vs. George Mason
Apr. 24, 2013**

Mark Pavlik, head coach Penn State

Opening Statement: First off, I would like to congratulate Fred [Chao] and the Mason team for the season they put together – we knew coming in that they were going to be a handful. When we played them at their place, the last two games were deuce games. We kind of expected tonight's match to start the same way, and it did not disappoint. I thought they did a couple of things really well that they did not do the last two times we played them. They handled our serving better than they had in the past – w we had four aces. I thought overall we just seemed to hang in there and just kept playing the game. I think the big difference, 14 errors, unforced for them, then again we had 13, but you start looking at the number of kills, that 11 point kill differential, and I think it was big after game one on their side. We managed to close away, and I thought our transition game really came up for us big in the latter parts of game two, three, and four.

Q: How concerned were you after the first set and a half? You had a lot of uncharacteristic plays, collisions, miscommunications.

A: I would say we were getting in our own way, and I think from a Keystone Cops point of view, I told these guys afterwards the toughest match to win is the one you are supposed to. You look at the history of the EIVA semifinals, and the history says team comes in, pays its dues, and leaves, and we move on. We knew that was not going to be the case tonight, but the good news is the league is getting more and more competitive, and we had some feeling out there and it was a fun match to play in and you saw the teams kind of be warned a little bit to tone it down, but it was a great competitive match, and the emotions were high because I think there was some things on the line that Mason wanted to take away from us. I think once we got out of our own way we just kind of settled down and played the game. I had great faith that these guys would settle into their game, and I think that is exactly what happened. It was kind of Keystone Cop-ish. Nick sets a great pick.

Q: You showed a bit of frustration earlier on in the match when it was a little bit too close for comfort. What was going on in your minds during that set, the very first set?

A [Aaron Russell]: Like Pav said, we were making some uncharacteristic errors. I think we were more frustrated with ourselves, but that definitely was not the way we wanted to start. We were frustrated with that but like Pav said, I thought that we settled down the second half of the second set, and from then on we played with much more poise.

Q: Earlier in the week you mentioned kind of that "been there, done that" mindset. Is that kind of what helped you guys settle down?

A [Peter Russell]: Yeah, I think so. In the second set we came to life and started playing our volleyball, and really controlled the rest of the set. I think that is really what it came down to. We had a bunch of guys, I think six of our seven starters were here last year, and the experience of just being able to say "hey, let's just continue to play our game, we are going to be okay," and even our one freshman, Callaway [Matt], came up with two huge stops late in set four to help close it out. So it was just a great team win, and I think the experience definitely helped us pull this through.

Q: How much did you guys need those stuffs right there at the end when it seemed like Mason was giving you guys a fight?

A [Peter]: It is huge. You can turn around and say it counts as one point, but as a hitter, you are hitting the ball as hard as you can, and having a blocker just stuff the ball right back in your face. It is kind of tough and it is a little demoralizing. Sometimes the hitter will come back and try to do something a little different, cut it a little bit too fine, or hit it a little higher, I guess, and start pulling balls out. So from a momentum standpoint too, it is just a big momentum boost, and obviously those points. A big way you can score real points is getting stuff blocks and Callaway come up big with that and we made some key digs when we needed them, and like I said, just a really great team win I thought.

Q: Nick, were you pleased with your performance tonight?

A [Nick Goodell]: By the end, yeah. The start was frustrating for everyone, I think. So after we got that out of the way I thought everyone played really well. Hammond gave everyone the ball, gave everyone opportunities, and they are a really great blocking team. They are probably one of the best blocking teams that we are going to have to face in the EIVA, and for them to not be able to control the game through their blocks really showed how competitive we are, or how much more aggressive we are now compared to early in the season.

Q: What did you guys see from the talking going across the net today?

A [Nick]: It is all fun and games. It is like a little mental thing. Some people can, I would not say handle it, but they can take in and run with it, or take it and explode. So you have to test the team sometimes.

A [Peter]: From my standpoint I did not even think anyone was really talking. Maybe if they had a big point they would maybe look across the net or something, which most of the time refs let go, but for whatever reason they wanted to kind of control the game and they stepped in. I guess they felt like they needed to, and kind of toned down the through the net stares or talking a little bit, but I guess that is what is going to happen when you have two emotional teams that both want to win.

Q: Does that pump you guys up when you know that another team is trying to psych you out like that?

A [Nick]: I feed off of it. I love that intensity between the teams. Everyone is getting heated. Everyone gets more aggressive, and that is how the game should be played. I think it is a kill or be killed kind of thing, and if they fire back, good for them, but we just have got to stop them. So think we controlled it well on our side. They were playing well, and I do not think they did anything wrong for the refs to step in, but I think they were competing just like we were.

A [Peter]: After that first set, obviously they were feeling pretty good about themselves, and they should. They played a pretty good set, and they are an emotional team. They were riding an emotional high, and I think they started looking through the net, saying a couple things, and that, to me at least, I kind of saw it as trying to taunt us a little bit, and that really I thought kind of helped wake us up and get our emotions a little more into it, and like Nick said I do not think I necessarily feed off of it, but if something like that is going to happen I am not going to just sit there and take it. I am going to fight back, and if I get a big play, I may not say anything but I will look through the net or something. I know the ref had to tell me to knock it off.

Q: Looking forward to Saturday's match against Princeton, expectations? There has been a little bit of a rivalry between you two teams, specifically in this season.

A [Mark]: There certainly has. It is going to be a great final. Princeton came in and really, I thought, took advantage of Harvard being off for two and a half weeks. If you guys check the Harvard schedule, the last match they played was, like the Tuesday after we played them or the Wednesday after we played them and then they were done, and it looked like they were a little rusty in games 1 and 2, but then all

of a sudden they seemed to find their stride and make a match out of it, but Cody Kessel, Schwagler serving the ball really well, Sterns is playing well, Junior Oboh is starting to figure some things out, Chris Kennedy is a good setter, Tony Ensbury, and you are going to see the two best liberos in the league battling it out. So it is going to be a fun match. Princeton will be ready, and if I know these guys, they will be ready.

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Opening Statement:

I think that was probably one of the better semifinals that have occurred in this gym for any team playing Penn State in a long, long time. I am proud of these two guys [Lucas and Stevens] and the entire team for how we came out and played tonight. I think we made Penn State earn everything they got tonight. I cannot even tell you how proud I am of these guys.

Q: After that first set you were the first team this season to beat Penn State in the opening set at home. What was the feeling like out on the court? Was it a confidence boost?

Dave Lucas (#4): It was a huge confidence boost. We knew that we were going to have to hit hard and fast offensively early in the game if we wanted to compete for the match in general. The first set was going to be big. We kind of stuck with them. We had a few big breaks. Obviously when that ball fell for set point, we were all riding a huge high. I think we carried that into the beginning of the second set. It was an awesome feeling for sure.

Hunter Stevens (#19): I think what we worked on in the past few weeks and the game plan that we came out with was really flowing. Everyone on the team really pushed through. We were making digs, big blocks. Raddy [Popov] and Paco [Velez] were big swingers. They were swinging hard. Graham [Gresham] came out really big too. Joe [Heim], our setter was putting the ball where it needed to go. We were flowing in all cylinders and trying to carry that into the second set. It was a good win for us.

Q: Hunter, in the second set you guys were rolling pretty well again. About half way through it seemed like the game turned really quickly and hard. How tough was it for you guys to get the momentum back?

A: There were a few shots that just went their way. Sometimes that happens in volleyball. I believe Fred called a time out and we grouped together for that. We had a game plan set in and we just re-focused, re-adjusted and tried to get back to the game plan. We tied it up later in that set. They kind of took it and just got a few points.

Q: Coach, despite the loss, does it feel like this match can be a building block for the program going forward?

A: For sure. I think what my seniors have left behind is a new attitude to our program that has been sorely needed for a while. For that I am eternally grateful. I think really good things are going to come for us in the next few years.