

December 17, 2011



An Interview With:

**UCLA
COACH MICHAEL SEALY
TABI LOVE
LAUREN VAN ORDEN
RACHAEL KIDDER**

THE MODERATOR: I'd like to welcome members of the national champion UCLA Bruins. To my immediate right is head coach Michael Sealy, followed by junior outside hitter Tabi Love, senior setter Lauren Van Orden, and junior outside hitter Rachael Kidder.

Coach, an opening statement, please.

COACH SEALY: First and foremost, I want to congratulate Kevin Hambly and the fighting Illini. I thought watching their USC match in the semifinals -- I thought they were the best team I had seen this year. I was concerned about the level they were playing at.

As far as my statement for us, I told the girls as we were driving over here -- we had our team meeting. I told them we were champions before we arrived in the building tonight and we're going to be champions when we leave the building tonight, whether you handle that block of wood or not.

I think we did everything we needed to do to qualify as champions. We grew as people. We created relationships. We created a team chemistry that is what the real memories are going to be.

And I didn't think that this match was going to define us. It certainly wasn't going to define us if we didn't win it. I don't think it completely defines us now that we've won it. I think we're much more than that. This is just one of those byproducts that was part of the journey.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.



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Q. Lauren, you really started feeding Rachael when it really mattered and particularly in the sets where you came back toward the end. Why? Why go to Rachael so much?

LAUREN VAN ORDEN: I feel like we had a set game plan before. We had established things in order to make her successful late in the game. And she's got good confidence. She's a point scorer for our team, and I think she's gotten better at putting us on our back and giving us that energy and leading by example and through situations. Set three there she really helped me through it and just kind of carried us through. She's definitely that go-to player.

Q. Rachael, how did it feel to be the team to bring this program back where it used to be?

RACHAEL KIDDER: It feels really good. I'm not saying I wasn't expecting it because I was pretty confident the whole year. But it feels great to finally bring the program back to what it used to be, and hopefully it will keep going this way in the future.

Q. Rachael, you guys -- that second set got away from you, and that could really have been a difficult thing to overcome emotionally. But then you came back and rallied at the end of the third set when you were facing a set point. Can you just talk about the mental toughness to not let that second set get to you and then to win that third set?

RACHAEL KIDDER: When we went in the locker room after the second set, we just kind of all looked at each other and we were like we're just going to have fun. Everyone's going to lose sets and win sets and you can't get caught up in it.

And we were just confident that it was our game the whole time and we knew if we had the momentum and we were in control of the game, then it was going to go our way. So we just stayed

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confident and helped each other out throughout the whole match.

Q. Michael, first talk about the team defense, especially in the back row.

COACH SEALY: I thought it was great. I think I teased at one of the banquets how every now and then as a staff we can be involved in the match about how we're tweaking our defense and placement and what we're doing.

And I think our Penn State and Texas match had nothing to do with that because they were just so big and physical, but I thought tonight we put the girls in the right places. I thought they made the digs they had to make. And even when the sets were tight I just felt like we were getting tons of touches, digging a lot of balls.

When they were scoring points it seemed like we were unsuccessful in our transition game so it never felt like we were getting blown out even when we were down three, four, five points I felt like we were getting enough swings to still be in control of that match.

Q. And then the switching middle for the fourth set, take me through that.

COACH SEALY: My assistant coach Dan O'Dell, he looked -- he keeps the chart as far as where we're scoring points, and we didn't score any points when Mariana was front. We just weren't blocking any balls. We figured Sara could jump in and get touches. Lauren and Sara work really well together. Lauren is really aggressive, Sara can flick it in from off the net. I thought that was the spark that probably opened up some of the pin hitters as well, just getting her in the match.

Q. Is that something you've done other times?

COACH SEALY: Normally she and Zoë split the same spot. So it's like Zoë will start or Sara will start and they trade off. And Sara can go in either of those middle spots. It was just one of those things she was always a borderline starter the whole year, and Mariana has been really good offensively and Sage was good blocking and hitting.

Q. Kevin said the move was courageous.

COACH SEALY: She was a starter more or less all year. She's gotten tons of playing time. So it wasn't -- she was a starter a lot of her career. Last year when Katie Camp went out with that

ACL, Sara jumped in and hit almost 400 over the last four matches of the season. She had enough experience to come in and play.

Q. Lauren, would you just tell me about setting her in that fourth set, because it was extremely effective?

LAUREN VAN ORDEN: I think all season she's been that consistent player who you can expect the same thing day in and day out. And she's very consistent with her routes and very precise. And I think someone who has the mindset is going to get the ball over the net no matter what. And having a three-year vet on the court who has that experience, you're not so afraid to go to. And she wanted the ball in every situation. She really went after it.

Q. Coach, Zoë had just a huge match. And there were a lot of times there were jousts or near jousts where she seemed to be everywhere. Would you talk about what you saw Zoë doing out there tonight?

COACH SEALY: When I saw her play as a club volleyball player last year, I was really excited to get her. She was really aggressive along the net. Sometimes technically she's not the most sound blocker, but there's just an aggressive instinct she has. She has the ability to really reach into low seams and get over the net.

There's some huge blocks in pivotal rallies to where she was able to go back and forth, back and forth, touch, touch, touch. And then absolutely pounced a couple of balls. That was huge momentum-wise.

Q. Then as a team, it seemed as if your serving kept them back on their heels, out of system, a lot more than SC was able to do. Did you see that in your serving?

COACH SEALY: Completely. I think that's probably been our forte all year. I think we served tough. I think we hit spots. We were watching them in their matches and their outs, and their outsides still hit for amazing percentages.

They're talented. We noticed they like taking big long approaches, made them serve short, come in pass the ball, get out. Do a lot of other things. You look at our team, you don't see that amazing jump serve that scores straight aces, but I think we do a good job hitting spots and making people really affect their routes.

Q. Lauren, you said coming to UCLA, this was what you wanted to have a chance to do, but maybe when you were out of high school nobody envisioned you as the setter for UCLA, but you felt like Coach Sealy believed in you when you came. Could you talk about what it feels like now to be a national champion for the journey you took?

LAUREN VAN ORDEN: It's funny, coming into this postseason everything felt kind of bonus for us, and I felt like we were on the same page beforehand, just really thinking that this is just another match, and we really went into this one match at a time and they're okay playing Penn State, okay playing Florida State. And it was just one more day, one more game you had to play. One more game you had to prepare for, watch video for.

And that kind of hasn't sunk in, but that's all it takes is one day at a time.

Q. We didn't give you a chance to comment on the play of Rachael. She was named-- not MVP, it's Most Outstanding Player. Do you agree with that assessment?

COACH SEALY: Her numbers have been off the charts ever since the playoffs started. I'm looking at her stat line here. And I told her especially at the end of game one, you know, I'm assuming that Illinois wanted to get their best blockers maybe on Rachael. She had to hit against their best blockers most of the night, getting a lot of swings. And even though her stat line is less than probably what she thinks is good, rarely were they able to really control her hit, dig and transition back.

Even when they were getting touches, they were stress touches. The fact she was able to take 71 swings, we got a lot of those balls back and were able to transition back at them, that's huge.

She's been fantastic. All year, obviously. You don't become a First Team All-American by luck. But I think it's gone to a whole new level since the playoffs started.

Q. Tabi, can you talk about I think, if I have this right, you had a save there at the end of the third set and then two kills. And how important it was when you guys are facing matchpoint for you guys to have won that set the way that you did?

TABI LOVE: Set two, you said?

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Q. Third set.

TABI LOVE: I think we just -- I think, as Lauren said, after we went into the locker room after set two, I think that was like a really big turning point for us. I think it would have been easy to get fragile because we were up by so much and come back -- they obviously had the momentum.

But I think once we made that decision as a team, I think that unity and our drive just really drove us to -- and, yeah, we were down in the third set, but we had already made the decision that we were going to win it. And so it was easy to come back.

Q. How do you feel?

COACH SEALY: Numb. I feel like Rachael stole that thing at the end of the table and we're going to get in trouble. It hasn't set in. I was teasing -- I haven't even celebrated the Penn State win yet. Still have to get through Penn State and Texas. Those are surreal. Up 23-11 looking at the scoreboard thinking we've got to score real points, gotta score real points. It's too close.

I told the girls coming here, you know, sooner or later the national champion aura wears off. When you think back about your senior season for Lauren or this season in general, you may remember the match and the last point, but you're going to remember the bus rides. You're going to remember Kelly Reeves on the road and did she really say that kind of stuff. It's the human element of what we created, the experience we shared, it was just unreal.

And I was teasing -- I haven't slept in a long time. I was talking to a lot of coaches over the last couple of days, I'm glad it's not just me, two hours a night, three hours a night. The wheels are spinning, your mind's spinning, trying to figure stuff out.

And last night it was just strange. There's this sense of detachment before I realized that I love these guys and we had an amazing experience and this match was not going to define us and it's transient and it doesn't stay and it's just not lasting and I was going to be okay with whatever happened tonight.

Q. And, most importantly, will you grow your hair back?

COACH SEALY: It's been growing ever

since I cut it, every single day, can't you tell? (Laughter.) They hated it long, which means I'll probably grow it back long. (Laughter.)

Q. I don't mean to pound this point home, but as a coach, they can say, oh, okay, we came back, were determined to win, but you were literally facing set point, and I believe it was Bartsch going for a kill and you were able to save that and come back. To me that's a mental toughness factor that at a point is pretty strong considering what had happened in the last set.

COACH SEALY: Yeah, I was definitely concerned after we were up 20-14, gave up seven real points and kind of let that second set slip away, to start the third set down 5-2, and looking pretty raggedy and tired. We looked pretty drained.

They got out to an early lead. Caught them at 14. Back and forth, back and forth. I think we had a little lead like at 21-19, then they jumped out 23-21.

Those matches are tough. And I think every team in the country has been up late or been down late and had that turnaround. And we were at Stanford this year, we were down 24-20 in the first set. Won it. We were down 24-21 the next set and won it. So that was kind of the dagger and then we pounced out to a pretty quick lead in set four.

It's tough to lose those sets and stay strong.

Q. Rachael, what does it mean to you to bring back the 108th championship to Westwood?

RACHAEL KIDDER: It means a lot. I don't know how to explain the feeling because it's just not something that I've ever like experienced or an accomplishment before. But it obviously feels great to bring it back to the school and do everything we can for our athletic program.

I think it feels really good for our team and even better for the school.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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