

Pac-12 Women's Basketball Media Day

Monday, October 7, 2019



Scott Rueck Destiny Slocum Mikayla Pivec Oregon State Beavers

SCOTT RUECK: Hi, everybody. Excited to be back here. There's been a few comments today how quickly this has come, and it does feel that way. It's like, I can't believe we're already back here. Excited about the year ahead, the journey. We have had a sneak preview in August with our trip to Italy, where this team competed extremely well, came together quickly as a family, and we just had a phenomenal time. And so the beginning feels like a little bit of a continuation for us, and so practice is off to a great start.

This is a highly competitive team that I can say didn't end the year last year maybe quite as satisfied as they would have liked, and are very motivated going into this year, and that's been a fun group to be around.

Love the people that they are, and there's a lot of talent throughout our roster, which is necessary in a conference like this one. And so we're looking at a year with a lot of growth throughout the Pac-12, great coaches throughout, and so as always, it's going to be a daunting challenge ahead, and we're excited for the journey.

Q. Scott, can you talk about the European trip? When teams get to do that, you get to do that once every few years, how much of a slingshot is that into putting your team together for the season. And also can you speak to Kat Tudor's status?

SCOTT RUECK: Sure, last time we did a foreign tour, which was my first time four years ago, that year ended in a Final Four, and so we would love a repeat of that. It is an awesome opportunity in every way. Certainly you get 10 practices that are full practices. You get to incorporate your new players. And then you get to go overseas and have what I love to refer to as shared experiences, you know. And for us, it's basically a 10-day retreat where you're getting to see things that most people never get to see as a group.

The only way it could be a negative is if you had a group that didn't like each other. I think that could be tough. This group loves each other, and because of

that, those 10 days never got old. We got to play four games.

When we go on our tour, we played against great competition. Some of the pro teams we played against had Americans on their roster already as they were preparing for their season, and so competition was good. And so it was just overall a fantastic experience. I think it does move you ahead when you get that opportunity.

As for Kat, when we were in Italy and during those practices, she was able to do a little bit more and a little bit more, and we'd be practicing and we'd see her over on the side shooting, which was encouraging to see her back to the thing she loves to do. And then when we were in Italy warming up for games, you could just see her energy come back. She was herself, competitive, bouncing around with the joy that she brings every day, funny. And so you could tell that she's feeling good. And so she is on schedule. I'm not sure exactly when she's going to be back on the court for us, but everything is progressing very well with her.

Q. Just want to get your thoughts on starting the season with the WNIT and kind of like that tournament format. Usually teams have a game or two before they play a preseason tournament, but you jump right into it.

SCOTT RUECK: Yeah, fortunately, exhibition games will get us there, but this is the first time we've played in the WNIT preseason tournament, and I'm excited for it. This team loves to compete. If there's anything about this group that I've learned, competition is their passion. If you want to teach them something, put it in a game format. That's going to get their best, because they love to compete against each other and against anyone they get to. So to start it with a tournament, I think it's perfect for this group. We open with Irvine at home. After that, it gets challenging.

If you look at the teams in this tournament, there's excellent teams throughout mid-major and Power Five. So great opportunity for us to grow quickly, find out who we are, and tournaments tend to bring out your best, so that's what I'm expecting.

Q. Destiny and Mik, a question for each of you. Destiny, what were you able to kind of learn from

last year in your first season in the Pac-12? How does that translate into areas of improvement that you challenge yourself with? And Mik, what about your game, as great as it is, would you like to step up a little bit in order to just carry this club along?

DESTINY SLOCUM: Yeah, no, to begin, I came here and he told me, he said, you're not going to experience anything like the Pac, and I was like, okay, okay. And then once you get your feet under you, and we did begin, it was a lot. In all truth, it was a lot to take in. It was a lot -- every night is a battle. Every time you go out there, you're going to find a team that is going to give you their best, especially against us. So we have to fight back.

I think as we went along throughout the season, I realized how important efficiency was, and that was my number one thing is just being more efficient, taking care of the ball, making sure all my teammates were on the right track at all times. And I think that's one thing that I've challenged myself to do and get better at throughout the summer, and even in the spring, of just kind of taking that point guard role, that leadership role of making sure that everyone is on the same page, that I'm efficient, and someone kind of to look up to that does stuff right all the time.

MIKAYLA PIVEC: I think for me, there's a lot of things I can improve on. But the things this summer that I really focused on was outside shot, being a big threat coming off screens, and looking for my 3-ball. And then also instead of maybe ramming through people and using my strength to get open, try to use more change of pace to create separation from my defender.

Q. Mikayla, it feels like just yesterday you were a freshman, but now you're a senior. Talk about the expectations that come with that and just kind of the feeling of being now an upper classman senior on campus?

MIKAYLA PIVEC: Yeah, I feel the same way. I remember our freshman crew moving into Tebeau, which was the freshman dorm, and Janessa's mom crying because she was so sad about her daughter leaving. But I think just kind of the urgency of understanding this is my last year here with these people and trying to make the most of it, you kind of have a new fire that this is your last shot at achieving what you want to do with this group of people and making lasting memories.

I think cherishing it, but working as hard as I can to help in any way I can to make this program have a great year.

Q. Scott, your take on the lay of the land conference-wise at some point, but on this team

specifically, in terms of another really solid recruiting class, what you've seen from some of the newcomers to complement some of the kids you have back. And I know you've been asked ad infinitum about Aquino, but if you could give us an update on her, as well?

SCOTT RUECK: Andrea has not been cleared yet. That was reported probably a week ago, I guess, as well. You know, Italy gave us that opportunity to see our freshmen play, and to see them -- it's such a unique thing because you're traveling around a new place in a country and you're learning so much, and you're going from this to that and you don't want to miss a moment. And it's like, we're going to play a game now. There's no practice, it's show up and it's play. Even for us that have been around, it's a challenge because there's no shoot-around. There's no scouting report. It's figure it out as we go, which is really fun actually.

And so for our freshmen, they're doing the same thing, figure everything out as you go, and they did an incredible job. Both Kennedy and Taylor, just picking everything up quickly, adapting, playing through their mistakes, which I thought was really amazing to watch. They had moments where it was like, can't get away with that any longer or oh, that doesn't work here. It was just momentary. It was, okay, on to the next, and then they conquer that.

So these are -- those two in particular, these are blue chip players from Kansas, from Texas, a McDonald's All American and one that could have been had she not been hurt the summer before.

Then Jelena Mitrovic is another freshman. Had her knee scoped so she didn't play in Italy. Not quite practicing yet, but we're hoping for her before too long, and then we have a walk-on in Noelle Mannen that has done a phenomenal job fitting in and adapting and becoming part of the family herself so quickly and doing a great job for us.

The conference is excellent, but you know, four top ten teams to start the year. I don't know if that's ever happened before. I think it's absolutely worthy, so it's exciting times for our conference.

Q. Beaver Believers found me on social media yet, you've got to ask coach, do I need to book for New Orleans now? How do you manage the expectations with this team?

SCOTT RUECK: I love the expectations. That's what we're here for. It's a familiar area for me. I like that other than the opposite. When you are -- when things are maybe not expected, there's some fun to be had. There's some joy in proving people wrong. When there

are expectations, it's the opposite. It's, okay, let's prove them right. And then unless you're one, there's still some people to prove wrong.

With this group, their expectations are extremely high, so this is just becoming the best team we can be every day. In order to do that, you've got to have strong leadership. I'm sitting next to two of the best leaders you can find, and we have a team, to be honest, full of them. This group is dynamic. They're highly competitive. They've had nothing but success throughout all of their careers, whether it's a world championship for Jasmine Simmons or state titles or you name it, and now a lot of success at this level.

So there's been so many great experiences that we can draw from. And so my goal each year is to turn this thing over to them, and it's to guide and direct, and to be a resource as our staff -- the best our staff can be.

But I can already feel the ownership out of our team, and the best seasons that I've been a part of, that's how it's happened. It's come out of the locker room. And so expectations are high, ability is high, and so that's a great combination, you know. And then this conference is going to get us ready. Just like a year ago, I said it before, I said whoever makes the NCAA Tournament or the postseason -- and look at Arizona -- we're going to be prepared for the postseason, and that will be the case again for all of our postseason teams.

Yeah, so I love the expectations.

Q. There's a culture that has been in place before you got on campus and it'll be there after you leave. As you integrate yourselves into that culture, you've got a good idea of what's expected and what works. When you're in the locker room and there is no coaching staff present with you, so you don't have to -- it's just you guys. How quickly are the young freshmen or the transfers understanding what culture means from a player's point of view and not just from Scott and his staff?

MIKAYLA PIVEC: I'll start this one off. I think initially as a freshman, one of the drawing cards to Oregon State is being around the team and family atmosphere is super important. So that's one of the initial reasons why they wanted to come here. And then for -- because the coaches can't always be there. So we've been working especially this year on accountability, and how our teammates may be willing to say uncomfortable things knowing that something isn't in somebody else's best interest, even though it's not easy to say. So something we've really talked about this spring, this summer, and coming into the season that will hopefully make the difference for us.

DESTINY SLOCUM: Yeah, to add on, I think it does pull to the character of recruits that Scott brings in. We all have a very similar mindset when it comes in -- it's not even that you have to be introduced to the culture, it's who you are already. There's not much of like, hey, you can't do that, hey, you can't act like that. This is how we act. It's a lot of, okay, they kind of fit in. Just how he said Noelle, she came in right away and fit our culture. I think just knowing that everyone that you come across on our team is already going to have that type of culture in them and that same type of mindset, it makes it a lot easier for us to do things like hold each other accountable and make sure that every day our locker room is a place that we walk into and our mindset is to get better, grow as a team, and then continue our family culture.

Q. What is the story of the walk-on process? You don't hear that much at a program so established like yourselves.

SCOTT RUECK: Well, it's interesting because I typically don't have one. In this instance, because of Kat's injury largely, we needed someone to practice. We needed another guard. And so this was a year where we entertained the thought of adding somebody.

Noelle just seemed to be the perfect one, and it was a friend of a friend who I knew of her through, and was actually trying to help her find a school. And then it kind of evolved into would you be interested in helping us? And so it was a neat process to be a part of, and I knew she'd be a good fit, but I had no idea that she'd come in and be such a great fit, and then also contribute so much on the court. She's the type that's extremely cerebral, better than you think. And I mean, I threw at her to the point one day in practice, for the first time before our Italy prep -- and so she's playing against Destiny and holding her own, didn't turn it over once, and it's like, okay. She's been really remarkable and already has had an impact on us and made us better.

MIKAYLA PIVEC: If you can talk to her, she's hilarious. She's super awesome.

Q. We asked Larry and also Cori Close just a little bit -- maybe this is something that seems like it affects the men's game more in terms of players being compensated for their likeness in California. Given Gavin Newsom's signing of the bill last week, as a coach who is competing for recruits, can you imagine in a couple years what it might be like for you competing against California schools who could have their athletes being compensated for endorsement deals? I'm sure that you have some thoughts on that.

SCOTT RUECK: I have thoughts, but they're

incomplete thoughts. This is all so new, to be honest. I have not had -- this was week one of practice. I've not had time to educate myself on everything within it.

I can tell you this, though. This is one of my first thoughts that I had just when you're hearing pay to play or whatever that might entail. I have been a part of this whole thing for 27 years now, college athletics. Most of those years still were at the Division III level without scholarships. There is so much power to the purity of that, of sport. Now here at Oregon State, where we have been able to give scholarships, which lets me sleep easier at night as a coach, knowing that they'll graduate without debt, gives me peace.

There is so much power to that, it would be scary to me to see that be lost somehow. Not saying that I know the answers to any of this, but I love what we do. I love the results that they get from it. I love the cohesive locker room that we have. There are so many benefits to that experience that I have watched with my own eyes and their preparation for life beyond what we do that this classroom -- if this classroom were to be changed in some way that would impact that negatively, it would make me sad.

All that to say, I don't have the answers. I don't know what the answers are. It's an overwhelming issue to my brain right now with what I know. I don't know what the solution could possibly be to make everyone happy. I just know from my perspective, this is an incredible opportunity for all of us. It's an incredible process to be a part of in the way that I've been blessed to be all these years. I don't want that part to change.

Q. Mik, what size 12s are your favorite this season?

MIKAYLA PIVEC: I know I have big feet. My hands and feet kept growing, but I didn't.

I'd say probably -- there's these Paul Georges that are white and orange that are just the most comfortable shoe. You may have saw them last spring, but those are still my favorites, just comfortable. They work for me. Colors are good, too. Keep an eye out.