

Penn State Volleyball
ILLINOIS vs. Michigan State – POST GAME
DECEMBER 8, 2017

Chris Tamas | Head Coach
Jordyn Poulter | Jr. | S
Morgan O'Brien | Fr. | DS
Brandi Donnelly | Sr. | L

Opening Statement: Hats off to both teams. Michigan State is a great team, lots of seniors and they really brought it from the service line. We knew they would do that and it's fitting that they ended on an ace. They're a really tremendous serving team that's tough to handle, but I thought we did a really good job and we fought every step of the way. I'm really proud of my team. We started back in February when I got hired, just nine of us in the gym, working out at seven in the morning, lifting weights, doing everything you need to do to be good at this game. We learned how to work the way I wanted to work. They did an excellent job of that. They did an excellent job of teaching nine freshmen how to do that over the summer and we have put together a great season. Not sure how many people gave us a shot at being here, let alone being 27-all in the fourth set ready to push it to five against one of the top teams in the country. I'm just really proud of the team. We always talk about it being a group effort and it has been that every step of the way and I couldn't be happier for the group. I could be happier if won obviously, but just the way we fought all throughout the season and how we went down with a fight tonight.

Q: You guys have had a lot of five set marathons this season, your last three matches in a row. How much does that toughen you and did you expect to be going to a fifth tonight?

JP: I think even early on in the season we were going to five. We weren't necessarily coming out as victors early in the season, so it was nice to see the improvements and mental toughness that we were able to obtain throughout the season. Having those experiences helped us win the last three matches and yeah, we were hoping it would go to a fifth set but, like coach said they're a really good team and it was a fun competitive match.

Q: Can you describe what the emotional swings were like out on the court? Like in those last five points where things were back and forth and the long delays.

MO: I think everyone on the court was pretty confident and we were just fighting to the end. We weren't going to give up early so, that's why we went to the 27s and we really fought hard.

Q: How tough was Michigan State's serve for anyone who had to receive it?

BD: It's the toughest we faced all year, but I thought we did a really good job of not getting rattled by it and coming back to pass with a good one. There was only a few runs that we were ready for and talked about beforehand not to get too upset by it and to move on and do our best on the next one.

Q: When you guys have had so many five set matches this year does that give you a different mindset once you get into this point of the season? Maybe you had a little more confidence that you've seen a lot of challenges?

BD: I think we've viewed ourselves as a little more tough. I think in years past we didn't finish out those five set wins and at the end of this season, we were finishing them out. I think we had a sense of confidence that we could win in big moments.

Q: Coach, any particular reason you guys are so good at getting into five sets?

CT: We put a lot of pressure on it during practice, so it's difficult to mimic game situations during practice. It's not quite the same if there's something on the line. If we have some accountability items as opposed to getting those last few points, but we do our best to put them in those situations where they have to make the right plays during practice so they have to make them out here. I think we're fortunate enough to have some really close battles at the beginning of the season. I know we weren't coming away with them at the beginning but, I also told them we have to be in those situations to learn how to win them and we certainly did that throughout the season. Tonight fell a little bit short but again, we've had some really great victories this year. Going back to last week and the three previous matches, the Big Ten is tough. You have three teams from the Big Ten in this regional so, I thought we did a really good job in a really tough conference this year.

Q: How tough was it to get your team turned around? You had two marathons on the west coast, you have to fly back and come over here. I know it's not the easiest place to get to but, how do you have your team feeling prepared after all that?

CT: It helped having some familiarity with the teams here. We didn't have to spend quite as much time with prep work as we would with other opponents. We mentioned in our first press conference it wasn't easy making that turn around. Coming from Seattle, we had to wake up early that next morning and it took us about 10 hours to get back to Champaign. We took the week a little easy and made sure we recovered properly and that we were ready for this week. We've been in situation in the Big Ten where we play Wednesday, Saturday, there's long travel times, there's midterms, but these players handle it great. They're used to it. There was no excuse, it was just what it was. It wasn't easy but we came out, we still battled and I'm real proud of them for that.

Q: Can you talk about the season you guys put together as a whole?

BD: I think it's obviously upsetting that we're not going to the elite eight, but at the same time, it's nice knowing that at the end of our season we became a team that worked hard for every point and just put it all out there. We became the best version of ourselves, so it's not as upsetting as most ends of the season.