

University of Iowa Volleyball

Media Conference

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Bond Shymansky

Volleyball Team



BOND SHYMANSKY: Thanks for being here. Really appreciate it. We're really excited about the kickoff and the start of the fall season and our group. In our fourth year here as a staff, we're certainly seeing the fruits of the labor, and it's definitely a labor of love. I love being a Hawkeye and love what our young women are doing on a day-to-day basis. They're in there watching video actually right now in between two-a-days during preseason training, and we're excited about our slate, of course. When we get teams like Iowa State here at home in the pre-conference and then we get the opportunity to compete in what is definitely considered the best volleyball conference in the country in the Big Ten, our group is going to be ready.

I thought we competed really hard last year, came up with a lot of big wins. We're ready to take that next step forward, and I know that we're really enjoying the process of examining and exhibiting our true mental toughness every single day in the gym.

Q. What are the keys to taking that next step? Are there one or two things specifically?

BOND SHYMANSKY: Yeah, I can remember a coach told me one time that great players make great coaches. Our playing talent continues to grow, and it grows both physically and with volleyball IQ. We're bigger, taller, faster, stronger than we've been, and that's certainly going to translate in theory to more points. But there's definitely no magic bullet. We've got to put in the sweat equity. We have the No. 2 toughest schedule in the country this year, so there will be no easy nights. There's going to be no off weeks. We're going to have to grind all the way through the season, and that's why we continue to talk about and work on our true mental toughness as a group.

Q. You mentioned the next step; is it something specific or is it just a gradual improvement, or what is it?

BOND SHYMANSKY: Yeah, you know, the funny reality about sports is the next step is always just winning more. You say, well, we need to win one more match. That's what we felt like last year. Win one more match then we get into the NCAA Tournament. You get into the NCAA Tournament as a Big Ten team, and you have a right to think about being in the Final Four and winning national title and that's because every night

you're competing against national-title caliber teams in the Big Ten. Right now there's 10 teams inside the top 30 in preseason. It's an astoundingly deep conference. And the other four teams that aren't inside the top 30, those four teams are really, really good. There's just no doubt about it that we've been working hard in terms of ball control and passing and serving and all the basics that every coach is working on this time of the year. Like every coach, I'm never satisfied with it. Our team just kind of continues to develop it. But just like kind of the maturation of our group. Really love the intensity and the culture inside of our gym.

I've probably said less this preseason than any other preseason that I've been here in terms of our training day-to-day in practice, and that's because they're doing it, and they're showing the leadership inside of the group to really explain to each other how to get it done and to motivate each other for how to do it higher, harder, and faster. That's been really a great rewarding part of the journey already for us as a coaching staff.

Q. You mentioned culture; can you discuss how you've had to build that, and are you pretty satisfied with the growth there?

BOND SHYMANSKY: Yeah, you know, culture is a great buzz word inside of all of athletics right now, and it is really tough to build, and a lot of times people think that they're influencing culture by putting a cool slogan out there or bringing in a guest speaker one day or something like that, but we really attend to it every single day. The four keys to our true mental toughness are having a great attitude, treating others really well, giving your very, very best, and being unconditionally grateful regardless of your circumstances. Those four things sound really easy, but they're impossible to do on everything that you're doing every day.

What we like about it is there's no end. There's no finish line. There's no, I've done that enough and I'm ready to stop. It is a consistent and constant challenge for our whole team, and that includes me, too, and so as we're kind of growing and learning. We talk about the transformational experience that should be happening inside of our program, and by the way, the end result is you win some volleyball games.

We love the culture inside of our group because we have a culture that really cares about each other in a

very deep and profound way that has trust and respect built into it. That allows them to go out there when they're down and still give. That allows them to kind of go to class when they're not doing so well in that class or allows them to work harder in the weight room, allows them to make good social choices. We continue to just really work hard to demonstrate, to model, to laud and applaud that true mental toughness and to continue to ask for it.

Q. As you said, one more win, you guys very well could have been in the NCAA Tournament. In year four, is it kind of NCAA Tournament or bust for this group?

BOND SHYMANSKY: Yeah, we don't ever think about things in terms of this or that, this or bust, do it or don't. That will come at the end. So the NCAA Tournament will either happen at the end or won't, and we will still have no control over it because it's up to a selection committee. The only way we take control out of their hands is to win the Big Ten Conference, and I think our team is good enough to do that. But really for us, it's just that feeling or sense of grind, work, do it day-to-day. Everybody loves the concept of being about the process, and you hear it in all these different places. Usually where you hear it is teams that are losing and programs that are losing, and they say, okay, the whole "try not to suck" thing of the Cubs or the Philadelphia 76ers are all about the process, the process, and people get impatient with that because it sounds like a cop-out.

So we've been about the process. We're four years into the process. Guess what; we're winning. We had the best season we've had in 25 years last year, so we're winning, but we're still about the process. You have to be, because it's too easy to get caught up in some goal along the way and then falter and quit or give up.

So that's why true mental toughness is our process, and that's why that's our continued goal, because it's unreachable, and so we don't ever want to stop with what we're doing, and that's where we're going to continue to get our improvement.

Q. Having turnover this year, you filled it with some transfers; is that something you wanted to find is like a stopgap to bring some of those younger players along quicker, or why go that route, especially with the culture thing that you talked about?

BOND SHYMANSKY: Yeah, we've really built our program the last few years on transfers. I started talking about the number that we've had through, and I think it's nine or ten. That's a lot when you only have a 16-person roster. The point is that when you start

doing it a lot, then it actually doesn't matter, and so the group that exists here is very friendly and open to transfers because they're transfers, too. Hey, how about that? So yeah, the transfers add a lot. When you get a transfer in, they bring experience, they bring baggage, they bring something unique that you just have to figure out how to utilize. Our transfer group so far has been very influential, and when I think about the ones from the past years, they've had great impact. The ones that we brought in this year, we expect them to have great impact, too. That's kind of the reason you bring a transfer in. They're supposed to come in and do something. But we don't think about it so much as a stopgap. We think about it as improvement, and so anytime I can bring in a player that I think is going to help us get better, come on.

So we've got some great new players that will come in, and I think they'll help us get better.

Q. What's the biggest way you think this team or this year's squad in general will be different than your first three years?

BOND SHYMANSKY: I think this year we're going to be steadier. We're going to be a little bit more stable, but we're definitely going to be more physically dynamic. We, like I said, just continue to get higher, faster, and stronger. That's going to allow us to compete better in the Big Ten. But we also need to be smarter because everybody in the Big Ten is big and physical. As our volleyball IQ has grown, as our understanding of how the game moves and how to prepare for opponents, how to learn and grow on our own, focus on our side of the net, you put all those things together, and it just equates to better volleyball. Play better volleyball. We talk to our group about how are we going to find two points, and in rally scoring in volleyball, two points is actually just one play, so the difference between winning 25-23 and losing 25-23 is one play.

We just need to be mindful of those small little details along the way that allow for that to happen.

Q. You mentioned the leadership. Who's been sticking out in the locker room and being the leaders?

BOND SHYMANSKY: You know, we have three captains, but we really don't hold captains to be the only leaders. We've had some tremendous leadership this year in terms of intensity that's coming from Annika Olsen, our senior libero. We've had great social leadership from Molly Kelly, who is being thoughtful about the impact of the greater world on our group. We've had a lot of discussions with our group about things that are happening in the world around us, things like Charlottesville or whatever, and those are really unique moments as a coach to be a part of and

watch our group be thoughtful young people that are growing into hopefully actionable adults and accountable adults to what they know is right and wrong. We're getting leadership in terms of offense out of our young setter group, but also out of our coaching staff, and it's been a joy for me to watch both Bre Payton developing our offensive side and our new coach Vicki Brown starting to develop our block and defense side.

Yeah, you know, we caution everybody, be careful because everybody is leading at something, so you have to decide what you're leading at inside of the group. So far we've had a lot of great leadership in a lot of different ways.

Q. You mentioned Olsen as a leader. She's one of your transfers, right, from Georgia Tech?

BOND SHYMANSKY: Yeah, she is.

Q. How hard is that to be a transfer that you spoke of and then a few years later she's one of your leaders?

BOND SHYMANSKY: You know, she's been here really for quite a while. I mean, three years that she's been inside the program, and it does take time for it to evolve because it's about respect and trust of your teammates, and that doesn't happen overnight no matter what, if we give them a captainship or not. You still have to earn that. We have to earn that as coaches with our players, too, and so it just takes time. But she has such great values and integrity and character, and it was pretty obvious to me that she had what it would take to be a leader. It took a little bit of time for her to exhibit that.

But yeah, she's really comfortable out there and not afraid to say what needs to be said but does it with a really kind spirit. On a side note Annika got engaged this summer, so she'll be married by next summer and off and grown and doing something else other than volleyball.

So again, I'm watching these young women become women and then get ready to go out into the world and do something significant, and she's a great example of that.

Q. Among those transfers that you added was Ashley Smith, a kid from right down the road. What have you kind of seen from her so far in the program?

BOND SHYMANSKY: Yeah, Ashley Smith has been a great addition for us as a transfer. She comes out of City High. City High was my first head coaching job back in the day, and so that's fun to have somebody of local talent here, and certainly brings a lot for the

Hawkeyes, and that's really important. She's a great athlete, really outspoken person with a lot of fun character, and the phrase that we use with our group all the time is find your uniqueness and then exploit it to serve the team. So Ashley has some really good uniquenesses that she's figuring out how to bring into the team, so we'll see if she evolves into a starting spot this year as a back row sub. I have no idea. We have our scrimmage tomorrow at 2:00, but even now we play next week, we're starting to come together, but we're not in a rush to make a judgment about who it's going to be and who it's not going to be. So we're just kind of taking our time, and a lot of players are still in there fighting for a starting spot.

Q. Being you and your staff have been here four years, what have you seen from teams that have won that can shape your team and shape your program to do that eventually?

BOND SHYMANSKY: Yeah, as a coach you have to learn what the others around you are doing and how they're doing it when they're successful. I'm not too proud to mimic certain things that are happening, right. We have to have our own identity and believe in the way we're doing things, but I think there are some ways that needs to happen in any program in the Big Ten to be successful, and actually where it starts is within the department. We're really thankful that we have an athletic department that's really pushing our program forward rather than holding it back. They're doing everything that they can do or they need to do really for us to be successful.

So yeah, when it comes to looking at -- again, physicality of players and things like that, we love our game atmosphere, we love our crowd and our fans. We were top 20 in attendance last year. That can keep growing. That will be tremendous. But bottom line is that it's still on us. When the ball goes into play that we just have to play better volleyball. But I think it's coming this year.

Q. What about Taylor's impact after a few weeks of practices? How has she been doing?

BOND SHYMANSKY: Yeah, Taylor Louis has been awesome. She is physically very talented. She's very gifted as a hitter and a blocker. But where she's been most impactful I think is just as a person. Tons of energy, really funny, pretty witty. She's definitely sassy at times, and you just need some of that. She's got some spit and vinegar in her, and you need that when you're going to compete at the highest level. Love how our team has embraced her.

We were talking as a staff yesterday, it's amazing to me how quickly that our team has embraced new players, and especially transfers, and I think it's just because

we look around and say, it's not my place to hold them out and judge and not trust them because I was that player, too. I was new here once, too. Somebody else had to embrace me when I came in the door.

Taylor has been a real joy to coach, and definitely, we want to push her. She has intentions to play professionally afterwards and to strive for an Olympic team, and I think she has the capability to do it. I'm just hoping not to mess it up for her.

Q. Reghan Coyle was your most improved player last year. What are you looking for from her?

BOND SHYMANSKY: Yeah, Coyle had a great journey last year. She came to us as a walk-on and earned a scholarship. As an Iowa kid, those are the exact stories that I think any volleyball player would dream of, and definitely the mentality of the state of Iowa, about you pull it up by the bootstraps and you just get after it, that's Coyle. She's not a woman of many words. She's just more the I'm going to get it done and keep sweating and doing it. Yeah, we expect her role to grow. We expect her to be really stable and continue to be really competitive. Coyle also just got admitted into the pharmacy school, so she's super smart and has to work really hard there academically, as well. You're talking about a one-two punch that's a pretty impressive person.

The worst part is she thinks she's funny. She's not funny. And you can put that somewhere in a story or on air. She busts my chops more than any other player on the team.

Q. You're not easing into the schedule, either; you've got Long Beach State. What does a tournament like that do for your program?

BOND SHYMANSKY: Yeah, we open up next weekend out in LA, and Long Beach State has won some national titles in the past. They're really strong. They play in an arena which they call the Pyramid which they claim to have magical home court powers, which is always fun to play out there. We also play Stanford, who's our reigning national champion from last year. They're loaded with young talent. We play Wright State out there. It's a great opportunity for us to get, again, high-level competition. No. 2 ranked strength of schedule in the country. That's where it starts, and it just keeps going from there.

It's a great chance. I asked the team the other day, raise your hand if you've never been to LA, and most of them did not raise their hand. We'll even take a couple boosters with us that have never been to LA, and so this is a really kind of unique cultural experience for us in that way, and that becomes team bonding. So I think we can gain a lot out of that experience, but the reality is the rubber meets the road there. We have to

perform and we have to be ready to fight and grind there, not just kind of see what happens. So I know that we'll be ready as a staff to help lead them that way, and they'll find their uniqueness and bring it to our team.

Q. Building off Coyle's story, when you've been here four years but you've been entrenched in Iowa volleyball for so long, is it kind of at a point where you're seeing girls you worked with in middle school being seniors in your program? What's that like?

BOND SHYMANSKY: Yeah, actually it's at the point now where I'm starting to recruit friends' kids, which that makes me terribly old, and when I start seeing names and faces come through our email box or through some recruiting service, and I think, oh, my gosh, I played with that person's dad or I coached that person's mom. That's happening, and it's really pretty special. The volleyball world is still really small, especially in Iowa, but the players and the talent here are really big. There are tons of super-talented players year after year that come out of our state, and we're working really hard to continue to draw those players in and make them Hawkeyes. Again, we love the group that we have now. A lot of in-state and around-state talent, like touching states to us, and that will continue to go and continue to grow that way.

I'm a lot like Coyle's story if you think about it. I was a walk-on coach at one point, and now I've earned a scholarship here to be the head coach at Iowa. Really neat moments of growth.

Q. You mentioned staff and you mentioned people busting your chops. What's the overall personality of this team? Seems like you've got a few different characters.

BOND SHYMANSKY: Yeah. The overall personality is they're really a nice group. They're really funny. They're definitely goofy like young people should be. They're lighthearted in a lot of ways. They're a total huge group of smart-alecks. I came into team video the other day, and one of my players was sitting in my seat, like in my spot and she was sitting there with my iPad and my reading glasses and mimicking me, and I didn't even notice at first and the team was just dying laughing, and those are just great signs of comfortability. I can take it as long as they win, and then if they don't, then I'll dish it back the other way. But they're just great, and you guys will enjoy talking with them and getting to know them. I really think they're tremendous young people.

Q. You mentioned you feel this team could win the conference title; aside from the obvious wins, what needs to be done? What needs to maybe be

shored up, improved on, to make a big run like that?

BOND SHYMANSKY: Yeah, being competitive at the top of our league, it doesn't need to be flawless, but mentally you need to be flawless. You can't back down. There can't be moments where you say to yourself, I don't think I can do this or I wonder if I can do this, and removing that self-doubt is really the greatest challenge that a coach has. We see that in sports all the time. You see teams that aren't as talented beat the more talented team. You see teams make deep runs or championship runs at something that weren't ranked anything, and it happens, it happens because of belief, and so we're really working on that part.

But it's something that is so hard to measure, you can't touch it and see it and put it on a stat sheet, and so day-to-day we're working to get those reps and to get that feeling that develops that self-confidence, that fights off self-doubt.

You know, volleyball bounces in funny ways. It just does. And so because it can go a lot of different ways and points happen a lot of different ways, we're sure that we can impact the game and put the ball where it needs to be and accept that at times we're going to lose points and keep on going forward.

I do, I like the resolve of our group. I like the true mental toughness of our group, and I really think they're going to put it to test this year.