

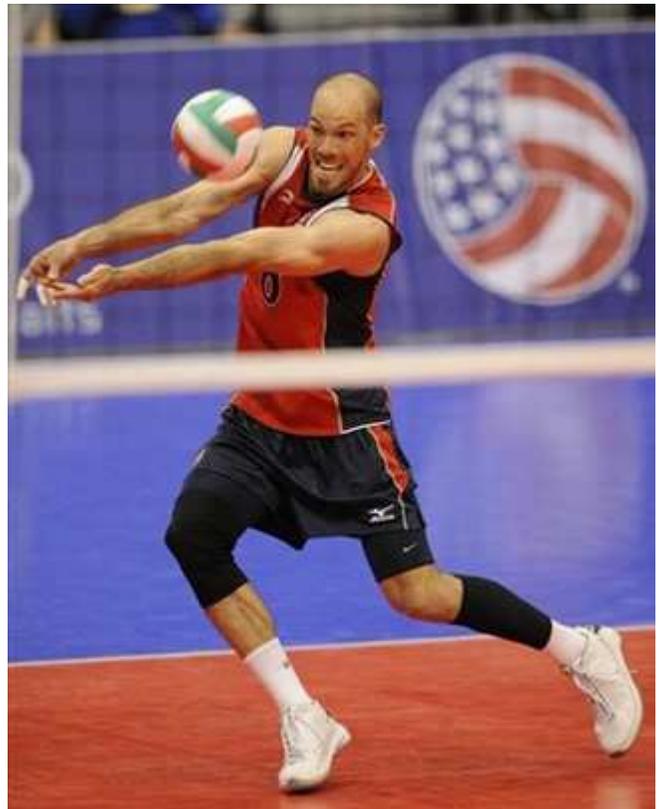
Reid Priddy – “You Don’t Just Get To Win.”

Reid Priddy is ready to stride out of the gym. He came in early, passed some balls in serve receive as the other men’s national team players started to warm up. Soon he was replaced by some of the younger members of the team and Reid went to stretch and work out the kinks. He didn’t hit or pass another ball for 45 minutes and instead worked with his trainer on stretching and isolating the problem areas of a 35 year olds body.

Priddy’s High School Coach at Mountain Pointe High School, Fred Mann said, “I have never seen someone so driven in all my life as Reid was. Also, he was the best leader we have ever had. One day a kid asked me a question during practice. Something we had been over numerous times. Reid yelled at him and told him to stop wasting everyone’s time asking unnecessary questions. He was just that efficient. Did not want to waste any time in practice robbing him of opportunity to get work in and improve. When he graduated high school I told him I wanted free tickets for when he played on the National team one day. He did not seem surprised at that request. I had a good feeling about him. And I got my tickets for a world cup match against Poland a few years ago.”

Priddy is still at the pinnacle of his sport earning huge money professionally in Russia but this week is all about qualifying for the Olympics. In this candid interview, Reid talks about his Arizona roots, his best advice, the pressure involved with qualifying as the defending gold medal Olympic team and the start of the only volleyball podcast in America, the Net Live.

You played for Fred Mann in Arizona. Maybe not exactly a hotbed of the Men’s Volleyball world. But what did it take for you to get here; an Olympic Champion and International Player?



“That’s a good segue because I was just listening the Hugh McCutcheon interview from the show this last week and he talked about that. I truly believe that it’s the ability to change is what differentiates the people on this court and stay on this team for a long time. It’s the ability to learn to adapt and to change. We’re always changing,

were always being asked to change.”

Are you talking about Coach to Coach or match to match?

“You need to be able to adapt and to merge with different teams but more importantly I think you need to change in terms of how to play the game; your arm swing, your blocky our pass...the technical stuff. How do you become more efficient? How do you use what you're good at and get better at your weaknesses? Being able to have an honest look at yourself and your deficiencies and take those on is I think a real important aspect to continue to play at the next level.”

What coach or philosophy helped turn you into the player you are today?

“When I first got on the National team we were a very young team. I remember I wasn't a sought after recruit so to speak, I wasn't one of these blue chip guys so when I got on to the National team I was still relatively new and I was starting. I remember we had a couple of really tough losses and I remember Doug Beal at the time saying, "You don't just get to win." Like, it's not a right, you aren't entitled to it. I asked him what he was referring to and he just said, "You don't just get to win." and that stuck with me, it's stuck with me a lot. It couldn't be more true, you know? The guys on the other side of the net want tin just as bad or even more sometimes. It was breaking through that sense of entitlement that we have in our country. This expectation of a fairy tale ending and all those things. It's hard work. You don't just get to come in and it's not going to just be handed to you. That was really important for me to hear.”

How has your role changed in the USA Men's program over the last ten years?

“It almost changes from summer to summer, from year to year. I think what this team needs from is for me to just be myself. I think for a few years thereafter Beijing I was trying to do too much, both off the court and on the court in terms of leadership. I would like to, and I think I help the team best when I'm fully engaged, playing as hard as I can and helping my teammates and that's it. Not trying to go above or beyond, trying to figure out where our weaknesses are or the intricacies. I'm a very analytical player but that is not true of all players and that doesn't really help all players when you continue to peel the onion, sort of speak. So bring that energy and that engagement on a daily level, 100% commitment is the best way I can express my leadership, by example.”

You are in a pressurized tournament setting where you have to win to qualify for the Olympics. How do you handle the pressure of this situation?

“It's very easy to just think about the end result to qualify and just think about that match on Saturday but there's so much that needs to happen between now and then and all the clichés fit. We need to do what we need to do this morning to be ready for

tonight and when we get to tonight is about that first serve and finding that rhythm and just out working teams. You know that's something that Alan (Knipe, USA Men's Head Coach) has been really stressing to us on is no team can outwork us. I think that's how you deal with the pressure is try and stay in the moment and you know for me personally I just want to go out there with no agenda and no fear and just be aggressive and like Alan said, just outwork these teams. You know, pursue every ball and just have that mindset that tonight's match is a final of sorts. That's how the Olympic Games are and I think having that in the moment mindset is really how you beat that pressure."

Was there a letdown after winning the gold medal in Beijing to this team during this quadrennial?

"I would say for six weeks we were the best team, or maybe four weeks. That final four at world league we started to really make a turn. I can only speak for myself but after that, but once you take that it wasn't an arrival of sorts as much as a beginning. So the expectation going forward was let's rival Brazil's dominance. I think what really hurt that momentum was Hugh leaving and taking the majority of his staff. Alan became coach but wasn't able to disclose that information until his season was over so we sat without a coach for the entire off season. So I think the last three years we have really struggled with this tension between the expectation to rival and the constant disappointment that we were not there. So I feel like it was disappointing but that's the reality and I feel very good about the last two weeks culminating into a very efficient environment and I think you'll see the biggest gain with this team. You know right now were a total wild card and you have every right to think that. We've dropped in the world rankings year to year, we have flashes of greatness but yet well farm easy plays so I hope that we continue to clean that up and can peak at the right time. I clearly don't want to be that but given that this is the fourth year, I'm okay with it. It's a really difficult thing when you're trying to juggle overseas commitments with the National team so I think that's just what happened. I think we have the talent and I think we're on the same page as a staff and were moving in a good direction."

What advice can you give the young players out there to get them as far as they can go in our sport?

"For me, mice played in games with lots of extrinsic rewards. You know, so win this game and you get \$50,000. I've found that those matches and those motivators never bring the best out of me. So what I would say to those kids is to think through trying to be the best you can be, to be what Hugh (McCutcheon, Women's USA Coach) or Alan would call a master of your sport. Pursue that mastery of every skill and build that base of confidence. You start with to certain competency in every skill and continue to try and expand it, to really challenge yourself. Ask yourself how good can I be? What is my max potential? I find the most fulfillment in that pursuit. I think the results and the extrinsic stuff will take care of themselves. To really try to pursue

competency and expand that competency and being a great teammate. I think those two things and the rest is going to take care of itself.”

How did your podcast the Net Live come about?

“You know, over the years, playing overseas, you have a lot of time to think about possibilities and you get exposed to volleyball in other cultures that are thriving and so when you come back to the United States you want to implement some of these ideas. For me, right after the Olympic Games when we won the gold, our little media tour wasn't on TV and all that stuff, it was on radio. I remember being exposed to various radio stations and thinking that's the best job ever. You know you just hang out and talk about what you love and what's interesting to you and you get to take callers and I just think that's super cool. I had a list of things that we're ideas and possibilities and I got together with Kevin (Barnett) and I said what on this list do you want to tackle together and that really stuck out because this was something we could do remotely and not be in the same location. So we did some research and got some help from a lot of people figuring out what technologies could work and we were introduced to Blog Talk Radio and, I don't know, we have like 200 Shows in the can now.”