

# Pac-12 Conference Basketball Media Day

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San Francisco, California, USA

## UCLA Bruins

## Coach Cori Close Charisma Osborne Kiki Rice

### Women's Head Coach



each and every one of us, and I don't think it's like, oh, I have this role, 'I'm stuck in this role. I think everyone is just super excited for the season and is willing to do whatever it takes for our team to be at the top.

KIKI RICE: Yeah, I'd say it's just a ton of spending a lot of time together and really getting to know each other on and off the court. I think we're an extremely competitive group and you can tell it in practices and scrimmages and stuff but I think we're all here to compete and to win so I think we all make each other better, and I think that's the best thing about this group.

CORI CLOSE: Well just like Kiki just text me a few minutes ago and said, there is a ping-pong table out there. We got to play. Like it crosses the competitiveness, crosses all lines.

CORI CLOSE: Hi, everybody. It is so great to be together. We are excited for this coming year and just really want to say thank you to all of you. As we have really set the stage in this conference of being about growing the game, that doesn't happen without all of you, and so just excited about this year, excited about our team, but also excited about us continuing to grow the game together.

Thank you all.

**Q. Coach, you lose a lot after last year. How much does it help to have Gina back and healthy and actually be able to play this year, and what does she bring to your team and some of the things you missed that she could've brought last year that she's going to help this season?**

CORI CLOSE: Yeah, I think Gina is really a consummate leader. She brings great energy. She has a confidence about her in the way she carries herself. She totally defines herself by how she makes everybody else better.

I think more than anything else that's ever going to show up on a stat sheet, Gina provides great leadership and confidence I think that will be infused to the people around her.

**Q. You have the top recruiting class coming in, a lot of new people. What are you guys doing, all three of you, to get the chemistry going and to have the high-caliber players coming in so you've got to even out all the personalities? How is that going?**

CHARISMA OSBORNE: Well, the personalities are great. They mesh really well with the people that we already have on the team. I think honestly, with this team, everyone is just so open to doing whatever role Coach Cori has for

You know, I think the reality, though, that they both have touched on is, I'm a true believer that connection precedes commitment, and so there was a big emphasis on let's really get to know each other this summer. Let's create great, great memories. Let's really be intentional in how we go about doing that.

I think that not only builds trust, but it builds our competitive nature because everyone trusts that we're in it for the right reasons.

When you compete with each other, you're calling each other up to new standards.

So I think that's been pretty critical to build those connections and to celebrate each other's differences. We all really bring something different to the table.

I will say this about them being the No. 1 recruiting class. To me what makes them really elite is they're also No. 1 recruiting class in terms of character and other-centeredness and work ethic.

So I think that's why Charisma is able to say what she's says, because there's just a commitment to team and to character. But in terms of putting people out on the court, age ain't nothing but a number to me. I couldn't care less.



In terms of how we mold together -- and I'll be honest with you, we're a work in progress in that; I don't think we've found that on-court totality and chemistry yet, but that will come.

Really excited about where they're going and what they've brought.

**Q. I was curious on your take on the soon-to-be move to the Big Ten, and obviously women's basketball in the Pac-12 is better than any other conference in the country. Your take on the positives and then the negatives, maybe the travel of that move?**

CORI CLOSE: Well, I think the reality is that the unknowns of how the travel -- I don't know how that's all going to go, but what I will tell you is I am so thankful to be a great partner in the Pac-12 for the next two years.

I have been one of the people that is all about back the pack and building the game. I'm so thankful for what we're going to be able to do over the next two years, and we are committed to being a great partner to that end.

You know, choices were made to move us to that conference, and I think there's going to be great opportunities to grow the game in a different way.

My ultimate commitment is to the experience of the student-athletes, and so my job is to leverage that decision to the betterment of our student-athletes, both as women, both as students and as athletes, and so that is what I will focus on as that transition is made.

**Q. When you talk about the betterment of student-athletes, I know you guys made quite a deep run in the WNIT postseason last year, but there were some challenges that came with a run like that. There's reports the NCAA is looking into potentially adding its own second tournament. How do you view that as a coach who just experienced with the WNIT has been like?**

CORI CLOSE: I actually happen to be on that committee that was discussing that, and I actually am very passionate about it. I think it is an incredibly different experience, as our players experienced, as the NIT is for the men.

So I'm very pleased the steps the NCAA is taking to fund a tournament that is proportionate and congruent to what they do for the men. I think it is a great investment and I think it is the right next move, and I look forward to seeing how that can contribute to the student-athlete experience and postseason play, and that we'll continue to grow

opportunities across our country for March Madness even though it may not be the NCAA Tournament.

I think those postseason opportunities are still important and still valuable.

**Q. For your student-athletes, I want to start with Kiki. For those in the room who weren't glued to the McDonald's All-American game like I was, what is the best attribute of your game?**

KIKI RICE: I think the best attribute of my game is probably my ability to get downhill and attack in transition. I think that's really what I excel at, and I'm able to translate that over to the college level.

**Q. Charisma, the leader of "all we have is all we need" last season, what did you learn about yourself that's going to help you this season?**

CHARISMA OSBORNE: I think I just learned that I can accomplish hard things. Last year and even the year before was just really hard. I think for everyone. I think just trying to figure out and navigate our team and what was going on.

Just knowing that I can accomplish hard things, and hopefully it gets easier from here on out.

**Q. From a health perspective, how's the knee?**

CHARISMA OSBORNE: Knee is doing great. I'm doing great. The team is doing great. Excited for this year.

**Q. Coach, all we have is all we need. That was a season I know you probably want to forget more than remember, but I think there were so many great takeaways. What was one of the biggest ones for you?**

CORI CLOSE: I think there are so many. Whenever you look back on really difficult things, as much as we all in life would love for us to learn the most drinking iced teas on the beach, usually it doesn't happen that way.

The reality is that focusing on things under your control, finding joy, is really a choice. It's not dependent upon my circumstances and how we create that for each other.

My job is to create struggle and joy every day and a balance of that because I think a great learning environment needs both.

I think that was really driven home for me as we went through the adversity of the last couple of years, that that is still my responsibility and that is still under my control.

And also that comfort can be a dangerous thing.

Reality for me is that as we have a lot of fun, and not that I want to go back to some of those circumstances, but the discomfort of adversity really does bring about really great growth. To not try to avoid that because of past experiences.

**Q. Charisma, I know the freshman class, high-caliber players and people, but this is still all new for them. How big of a focus has it been for you to set the tone for some of the newcomers and to be a vocal leader in both the locker room and on the floor?**

CHARISMA OSBORNE: Yeah, it's actually been a challenge for me, as well, trying to balance giving them grace and still holding them accountable to the standards that we have. But I think they've been doing a great job.

Obviously I remember being a freshman; it was not easy coming in. But I think they've been doing amazing just trying to learn things, watching extra film on their own before practice, going through the plays, things like that.

But it's been a challenge but super fun, and I'm excited to see them continue to grow.

**Q. Coach, kind of piggy-backing off that, are there any other players who have really emerged as vocal leaders for this team or have really taken the freshman class under their wing?**

CORI CLOSE: Well, it definitely starts with Charisma, and she really sets the tone. We have a group, a LIT group, leaders in training, that Coach Shannon brilliantly leads, and it's actually almost a class for them and they do extra studies; they do extra things.

The people that are in that group are Dominique Onu, Gina Conti, and Emily Bessoir. I think they really lead differently, but they are a powerful collective in their leadership.

I think that, though I say the vocal person has got to be Charisma Osborne and how she sets the tone for that, but those four collectively together have made a great commitment to not only be vocal leaders, but to be leaders in practice and in their own influential ways.

CHARISMA OSBORNE: Cam just joined, too.

CORI CLOSE: That's news to me, but Cam just joined, too. Thank you.

**Q. Coach, I know you were talking a little bit about the recruiting class. What have you seen from the freshmen thus far? Also, I remember that you've had great recruiting classes before, and I want to say that Jordin Canada, Monique Billings was a No. 1 ranked recruiting class, as well. Obviously those are high standards to live up to, but do you see any kind of parallels maybe this early on from some of these incoming players?**

CORI CLOSE: Well, I've learned some valuable lessons. I overscheduled with Jordin Canada's class when they came in. I've learned some valuable lessons. But one of the things -- I actually do think that has helped me become a better coach for this particular group.

But I think one of the things that they do really, really well is they have a great balance of having unshakeable confidence and competitive spirit. I don't think they're afraid to step into whatever role is going to help our team win.

At the same time, they're not afraid to also say, this is really hard and I have a lot to learn. I think that's a really good healthy tension for them to be in.

It has not been easy, and it has not been a walk in the park for them, and at the same time, they are making an impact, and I think if we can keep that sort of balance going, I think that's going to be really key.

You know, I think we're going to be different in February and March than we are in November and December. I think that we just have so much growing to do, and really only Charisma and Cam played a lot of pressurized minutes last year together.

So everybody, either they're coming back from injury or for whatever reason, we have just a lot of new pieces that we're trying to mold into a synergistic group, and that's going to take some time.

But the freshmen are doing great, and I think that we just have to give them -- I think Charisma said it great. Give them grace to learn but hold them to the highest standards as we go about that.

**Q. I'd like to circle back on the issue of leaving the Pac-12 for the Big Ten. With the players in your thoughts, this is a decision that seems highly driven by football and without a lot of regard to other athletes, including -- you know, women's basketball has a powerhouse conference here and you're going to be asked -- not you, Charisma; I think you'll be done, right, by the time it happens -- but just you're looking**

**at it as someone who played the whole time in the Pac-12, you're going to end up in the Big Ten. What are your thoughts about it?**

KIKI RICE: I say that coming in here I'm just focused on these next few years playing in the Pac-12 and being fully committed to competing in this conference and having the experience of playing the other Pac-12 teams and just being fully focused on being in the Pac-12.

And then for the next two years I'm just looking forward to after that playing in the Big Ten. I think it'll be an adjustment, but obviously it's another opportunity to play in a new conference, and I think it will be exciting.

CHARISMA OSBORNE: Yeah, obviously I won't be here anymore, but I think I'm just super grateful for the Pac-12 and being able to compete in this conference, and then moving forward for the people who will be on the team, I think they're super excited about whatever is to come.

Like I said, and like Coach Cori and Kiki said, we're super excited to the Pac-12 while we're still here and excited for this upcoming season and the next season.

**Q. Corey, even if this move does feel football-led and football-driven, maybe even a little men's basketball, it does seem like there is great opportunity for women's basketball across the landscape for television media rights. Obviously you're making a move to a difference conference, but as somebody who's a West Coast kid, what do you see as the opportunities for television rights to grow all across women's basketball?**

CORI CLOSE: Well, first of all, I like that you called me a kid, so I'll take that, first of all. Second of all, I think the reality is I will continue to go back to what is best to grow our game. I have never felt disregarded in this move. I will be very honest with that. Even though we know it's driven by some football and media rights.

I do not ever think that when we were in the Pac-12 that women's basketball was disregarded and I have not felt that in the move to the Big Ten, that women's basketball is disregarded. I think that's a great compliment to how women's sports in general are being viewed and how we're growing.

So we want to continue to be a part of the best growth time in all of women's sports and in the game of women's basketball. I'm just going to be looking at whatever opportunities are in front of me in the next two years and as we transition to execute that mission.

**Q. Charisma, after a down year by UCLA standards, how hungry are you to get back to the NCAA Tournament? I know your freshman year you didn't get to have one. You guys made it your sophomore year where it was weird, it was in the COVID time. How hungry are you as a player and leader of this team to take UCLA back to the NCAA Tournament?**

CHARISMA OSBORNE: Yeah, I am very motivated and excited and I think the whole team is, not just me. We know how it felt last year to not make the tournament, so I know I never want to have that feeling again. But I'm super excited, and I think in practice everyone has just been showing that we're capable of making the tournament and even going to the Final Four and winning a National Championship.

I think this experience from the past year like really is just giving more momentum to this year and helping us wanting to win.

**Q. This may be a hard question, but you guys have all this talent, and I love watching your game. Charisma, very excited to see you. I'm going to put you on the spot. Who's your starter?**

CHARISMA OSBORNE: Wow, you're really putting me on the spot.

**Q. Come on, you want to win. You're a leader.**

CHARISMA OSBORNE: You're right. Hard question here. So I'm going to go with -- I've got to go with Kiki. Just sitting right next to me. For sure going with Kiki. I'm going to go with Cam, Emily. Look out for her. She's been doing great in practice. And the last spot is a toss-up right now, Gina, Dom -- I can't give you a for sure answer, but probably out of those two for the last spot.

**Q. Kiki, for your coach to bring you as a freshman, who's going to start with you, because I know you're going to say yourself, or you should?**

KIKI RICE: Okay, obviously Charisma, as well. No surprise there. Emily, Cam and I'd say depends on the game, whatever team we're playing, either Dom or Gina.

CORI CLOSE: I can just say you're going to see a lot of different starting lineups as we go along here and as people morph and grow. I'm impressed you guys were willing to put yourself out there. I probably would have deferred. I would say there's going to be lots of opportunities and on any given night you're going to see a lot of different things.

CHARISMA OSBORNE: Anyone can start on our team. That's how good we are.

**Q. Coach, what is your biggest takeaway from your USA Basketball experience and the kind of players you got to run out on the floor?**

CORI CLOSE: Well, I think it's a little bit more global than that. The second part of that question is that you just see trends in our game in general, whether it be at the FIBA level or the WNBA. I think you're seeing a more positionless, versatile style.

If you can only do one thing, I think the spacing of the floor, the ability to shoot the ball, you really need to be able to have a higher basketball IQ. I just think that it's expanding in such a great way, but it demands growth by our women, both intellectually about the game but also in their skill set and fundamentals.

I think that really was great, and it's so fun even today seeing several Pac-12 players that I had an opportunity to coach with USA Basketball. It's just such a great growth-producing experience. From the coaches I got to work with, Natasha who's now at Arizona State being one of them that I got to learn from was tremendous.

But my biggest takeaway is here they have won more gold medals, and especially on the women's side, than any other country. They never talk about the gold medal. They always talk about gold medal habits.

Charisma can roll her eyes because we always talk about that we're not talking about winning championships, we're just talking about championship process and championship habits. Then we believe it truly will be a byproduct of that.

That was really impactful for me, because obviously their outcomes speak for themselves, but they never talk about the outcome when you're in the journey. It is truly about the habits within the journey.

**Q. For all of you, and especially Coach and Charisma, why is this club going to be good this year, on an uninterrupted schedule, healthy bodies, the freshman class? Why is this club one to watch in Pac-12 play?**

CORI CLOSE: I think there's a lot of -- everyone right now is willing to dream big, but not everyone is willing to work big. I think this is a group that is willing to work big, and this is a group that is willing to be coached hard. They're also about the team.

That can be such coach-speak, but any coach will tell you with the absence of that mentality, you're not going to be

competing for a championship.

As we try to do something at UCLA that hasn't been done since 1978, you have to have uncommon women willing to make uncommon habits if you expect to yield an uncommon result. I do believe they're willing to develop uncommon habits.

CHARISMA OSBORNE: Yeah, I agree with Coach Cori. I don't think it's just a coach thing. I think team comes first, and I believe that everyone on the team really believes in that and puts all their personal goals aside, from what we need for the team.

I think that's super important, and as long as we keep doing that, then we should be good.

**Q. Kiki, the Big Ten; you have some East Coast roots and I didn't know if you've thought about that or if the younger players have thought about what that's going to be like in a couple years to travel back and forth and play teams all over the country.**

KIKI RICE: Yeah, I think a nice benefit for me will be especially being able to play a lot of the games a lot closer to my family. Being from D.C., playing at Maryland, Rutgers, Penn State, all along the East Coast, I think there's going to be a lot of games where you're going to have a lot of people from my area who will be able to come, so that will be great.

CORI CLOSE: This year we've got a lot of people from Columbia, South Carolina, who's going to be at that game, as well. That's where her mom's side of the family is from.

**Q. Kiki, I know that you had a chance to play for Stanford. You were heavily considering them, Tara VanDerveer. Not a lot of people turn that down. Just talk about your decision to choose UCLA, and obviously it says a lot about your coach, Cori Close, and her program, that you would choose them. Talk about your decision to choose UCLA and why that was the right decision for you no?**

KIKI RICE: Obviously going through the recruiting process I had the opportunity to go on visits and talk to so many incredible coaches and teams, but I think really what separated UCLA for me was the fact that they really checked so many of my boxes, and I think coming to a school and accomplishing something that hasn't been done before at a school is just so appealing to me.

To be part of a group to be the first to do something, make it to a Final Four, win a National Championship, is really what drew me here.

