

# 2023 Women's College World Series

Wednesday, May 31, 2023  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

## Tennessee Lady Volunteers Coach Karen Weekly

### Kiki Milloy Ashley Rogers

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Tennessee.

Karen, you may want to give an Opening statement.

KAREN WEEKLY: We are absolutely thrilled to be here at Oklahoma City. This place has changed a lot since I was last year, obviously for the better.

What a great atmosphere, what a great environment. The way we've been treated so far is phenomenal. People everywhere to help you get from Point A to Point B. You can tell it's a really well-run event.

Couldn't be more proud of our team for getting the job done, getting us here and giving us a chance to compete for a championship.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

**Q. Coach Weekly, if you want to talk about what the past few days has been like after it kind of settled down from knowing you're coming here. What have the emotions been? What have you been reflecting on?**

KAREN WEEKLY: Just joy. That's the best word I can describe it with, is just sheer joy. Joy for these girls who worked so hard. When they do things the right way, as a coach you just want it so bad for them.

Just so much joy for them that they got to move on and they get to come here and do what they do so well, which is just come out and play every day.

Our last couple practices at home were really good, just like the last few weeks. They just keep getting better every day.

**Q. Coach, I know in one of your earlier interviews you talked about how Ralph helped recruit basically most of these players. Could you talk about, has the culture changed much since he left, kind of just reflect a little bit more on the impact he had. He's still kind of involved.**

KAREN WEEKLY: Well, I go to bed next to him every night, so he's very involved, yeah (smiling).

Ralph and I did this together for 20 years. Tennessee softball is not me at all, it's a whole lot of players who come through this program and built a great tradition and a legacy.

Yeah, Ralph is still very much involved. They love when he comes to practice. He doesn't come around as much as I thought he would, but he lights up the room when he does come. Just a lot of fun to be around.

I don't know that the culture has really changed. I think, if anything, it's these ladies and our leadership council that really committed to a lot of things this year which has helped our culture be what it is. You have to have a great culture of caring about each other to be sitting here right now.

**Q. Can you talk about Mackenzie Donihoo, what she's done for your program and team.**

KAREN WEEKLY: She's just a fireplug. My goal last year looking in the transfer portal was really one thing: competitive fire. And we found three ladies, Mackenzie and Giulia Koutsoyanopoulos and Payton Gottshall, that are warriors and competitors.

She brings a lot of spark to our practices. She's always talking. The pitchers just love her because right there behind them at shortstop they can hear her voice encouraging them all the time. She's been a big boost.

**Q. Kiki, I know there's been some times that you talked about your relationship with Coach Weekly, how it's changed and evolved. At your visit, you said you**



**didn't know if she liked you really. What happened on the visit that had you thinking that? How has it changed now?**

KIKI MILLOY: Karen is an no-BS person, so you get what you're going to get. As a young girl, I wasn't expecting that probably because I'm very much like that as well. My mom, I went home, Yeah, I don't think she likes me. My mom is, Yeah, that's because you guys are the same. I'm like, Really?

No, she was talking about Ralph earlier. Ralph is a little bit the reason why I came here. Then coming here, Karen, like, our relationship has grown, and we've gotten so much closer, just that neutral agreement - sorry - that neutral agreement that -- I'm sorry.

Yeah, just our relationship has definitely grown the more years I spend here.

**Q. How would you all in this league describe the impact and the importance of going wire-to-wire regular season champs, tournament champs, in terms of the veterans especially, like you all, what it does for the status of this program moving forward, just the general sense of the accomplishment?**

ASHLEY ROGERS: I mean, I just think it goes to show the strength of our league and how competitive it is. Because, I mean, it's tooth and nail every single time. You don't have an 'off weekend' at all. Anyone can beat anyone. It's so tough in the SEC. You can have one great weekend or a day, then bounce back and face a completely different team.

You always have to have your A game on every single time you step on that field, especially in the SEC. I think it goes to show the strength in our league.

I just think off-the-field things that we focus on, really prioritize this year, I think it gives you a little extra edge, too. Just focusing on the relationships off the field, I think it really comes down to it. When we get to the SEC, it's everyone who is the best on their team, everyone is there. But finding things that you can enhance and improve, that gives you that little extra edge on the field.

KIKI MILLOY: Yeah, I kind of go off of it. Winning a series is hard, but going to get those sweeps is even harder. That takes a lot of just drive from our team to be player-led.

I think that's why we've had so much success this year. Karen talks about the great teams listen to their coaches, the elite teams are player led. I think just having a lot of leaders step up on this team this year has gotten us to this

point so far.

**Q. Karen, just a bigger-picture question. There's a lot of talk about pace of play. Do you see that being an issue at all right now in college softball? If so, do you have any ideas or things you would change?**

KAREN WEEKLY: I think the 20-second clock, that would help.

You know, our games are longer in part because people want to watch 'em, so there's a lot of advertising to sell, too. So that's a good thing.

There's a lot of runs scored. I think that we maybe need to do some things that are going to swing the pendulum back a little bit in the pitcher's favor.

We went from a day when games are 1-0, it might have taken 20 innings to score that one run. I played in those games back in the day. And then we liven things up, and now hitters are just fearsome.

I think we can do some things. Long games are a product of a lot of runs and a lot of pitches being thrown. If you look at it, there's a lot more pitches being thrown now.

I think there's some things we can do definitely to shorten the games. I think it helps for the viewership because it's a lot easier to watch a two-hour product than a three-hour product.

**Q. Back to Kenzie, I was just wondering what her transition was like this season, and then what did coming from an elite program like OU do for her?**

KAREN WEEKLY: Her transition was really seamless. She jumped right in. I felt like her and the other two that we brought in, there wasn't really a period of time where anything was awkward. These guys welcomed them with open arms. When people come on your field, you can tell from day one they're here to get after it, they have the same goals you have, it makes it easy.

**Q. Karen, another big-picture question. Seeding of 32 in the NCAA tournament has been a topic. I've seen a lot of coaches talk about that. What is your feeling whether that's a move you think college softball should make moving forward or stay with the status quo?**

KAREN WEEKLY: No, I think it's absolutely necessary. As strong as teams are, you want to go into regionals knowing if you've earned something, you get what you've earned.

I think sometimes you can see some matchups in regionals that are driven by geography. I think we're past that. I think this sport has outgrown that and these girls deserve better. They don't need to have decisions made based on money, as popular as this sport is.

**Q. Kiki and Ashley, can you describe what it felt like to step on that field for the first time when you practiced today.**

KIKI MILLOY: We were, like, in awe almost. Not almost, yeah, I was in awe. We were just like, Man, we made it. I know people have probably seen our previous two seasons, ending up short.

Being able to get here is just, yeah, I'm still so much in shock even though we're here. I know as soon as we step on that field, it's game time tomorrow, we're ready to go.

ASHLEY ROGERS: Yeah, we walked in together. We're just like, Man, this is so cool (laughter). Yeah, reiterating what she said, we've been playing together, what, four years now. It's been the lowest of lows and highest of highs. This has been our goal from the very beginning, for both of us especially. We all bonded together and got here together.

That's the most rewarding thing, as well. I'm just so happy to experience this with Kiki and all these other girls that I love so much. I would not want to experience this moment with anybody else. I'm excited to step on the field tomorrow.

**Q. Karen, you played Alabama four times, you won three of them. Every sport is a little bit different. How much does familiarity with an opponent play when you're going into by far the biggest game against that opponent?**

KAREN WEEKLY: Yeah, it works both ways. There is no advantage that we have on Alabama, no advantage that Alabama has. I think it alleviates a little bit of the uncertainty that you feel when you watch a team on film, but then step in the batter's box, that looks a little bit different than it looked on film. It kind of takes that part away from it.

I think you can talk pros and cons all day long. I think one of the reasons where we are right now, this team has done a really good job of being in the moment and not thinking that what happened yesterday is going to help or hurt tomorrow. I think that's why they were able to do so well in the SEC juggernaut and then flip that when they got in the tournament and take it one game at a time. They really put

things in the past.

We talked this week, Alabama is going to be a different team tomorrow than they were last time we faced them. We're a different team than last time we faced them. They've done a great job of treating each day as new, recognizing even if that is a team is somebody we faced, they're going to be new and different this time.

**Q. We're getting closer and closer to Oklahoma joining the SEC. What are the Sooners in for when they join the SEC? Conversely, what are you in for when they join?**

KAREN WEEKLY: This league, I've been in it for 22 years, it's the best for a lot of reasons. But we just keep getting better. You know when they add programs, add teams, schools, they're going to be the best of the best. That's what it's going to be in softball.

I mean, when you have all of your softball programs advancing to regionals except one, and there's some years we have every program advance into regionals, yeah, that's something that they're probably not used to playing day in and day out. I have a feeling that OU and Texas won't have a problem with it.

**Q. Ashley, I know you got the award last night. I was wondering how you balance being elite on the field and off the field these last couple years being at Tennessee, being elite?**

ASHLEY ROGERS: Yeah, it takes a lot of discipline and a lot of hard work. I'm sure you understand. Yeah, it's rewarding to see all of it pay off in the end.

It was a goal of mine having a 4.0 coming into college. I think my parents and family instilled into me at a young age to be my best. They saw the potential I had on and off the field. They pushed me and pushed me and never let me settle.

Once I realized that on my own, took it upon myself to push myself in that way. I think it really helped me elevate my game on the field and just achieving the highest I could possibly achieve in the classroom as well. Then just having the support here at Tennessee, it is unmatched, the resources we have. I'm so thankful for Karen and everything she's done for me.

She knew I wanted to be a doctor coming in. She was like, Yeah, take whatever classes you want to, do whatever you need to get the experience you need to do that. Just set myself up to take the next step in my academic career.

Just all the resources we have, academic advisers, all the professors have been just absolutely phenomenal. I wouldn't be here without them and just all the hard work, just support they have for me over the years.

THE MODERATOR: That will wrap things up for Tennessee. Thank you.

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