

# 2024 Women's College World Series

Wednesday, May 29, 2024  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

**Duke Blue Devils**

**Coach Marissa Young**

**Lillie Walker**

**Jada Baker**

**Gisele Tapia**

Press Conference



LILLIE WALKER: I've grown up coming to watch the Women's College World Series with my family. It's pretty surreal to come and practice on the field, actually be in it this year. I'm just so excited I get to do it alongside my best friends.

**Q. Lillie, what are your memories? Where did you sit? What stands out?**

LILLIE WALKER: Yeah, I was just telling them earlier, via photo, a family photo, we're on the field. It's me 10 or 12, my chubby little fat stage type of thing. Now being an adult playing on this field, it's amazing. I've looked up to people that have come before me and played this game for so long.

It's awesome to see all of our hard work and teamwork that's gone together to make this culture so great to get us here.

**Q. First time here, not a lot of newcomers to the Women's College World Series. To bust through and get here, what has been important? What do you feel like has been important to get you to the point whereas a newer program you could get to this stage?**

MARISSA YOUNG: I think first and foremost, having the opportunity as a player myself to be here two out of my four years was really instrumental in understanding how difficult it is to get to this stage.

It takes the right group. It takes a lot of things to go well for you. A little bit of luck along the way. But as you all know, this year in college softball, there is so much parity. It is anybody's game on any given day.

I think what I love most about this team that has got them to this point is their consistency of how they've showed up every single day, regardless of who their opponent was. They've understood what they need to do and how they need to play Duke softball to be successful.

I think the consistency in their work is what got them to this point.

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with Duke.

Coach, if you don't mind giving an opening statement.

MARISSA YOUNG: Sure.

We're super excited to be here as a new program on the big stage for the first time. Really proud of this group and this team, everything they've accomplished and overcome this year, the adversity that they faced to get here.

We're excited to compete for a national championship.

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

**Q. Coach, could you just reflect on what it was like facing Oklahoma the first time, what you feel like is waiting for you tomorrow. Lillie, being from Oklahoma, what does it mean to you to get to come back here and play on this stage?**

MARISSA YOUNG: Sure, we talked about it as a group. Obviously we played Oklahoma the very first game of our season. Still had a lot of nerves to get out. It was a very competitive game. Once Cassidy Curd settled in, it was good. A lot of barrels that didn't fall. We walked away from that game really confident and understanding what we needed to do to get better as a team.

Obviously it's the post-season. They're a different ballclub. So are we. We know it's definitely going to be a tough battle tomorrow and a chess match, a lot like our super regionals of teams punching and punching back. We just want to be the grittiest and toughest team on the field.



**Q. Very few Black coaches in softball. For you to have broken through and gotten to this point, what does it mean to you? What do you think it can mean for Black coaches going forward?**

MARISSA YOUNG: It means a lot. I didn't have that as something to see growing up. Obviously in taking the job here at Duke, I understood that I had an opportunity to do something that's never been done.

It's taken players like these sitting next to me that believed in me and the vision that we had, had the commitment to the program and our core values to get us to this point.

I love looking at our team, all the diversity, everything we stand for. It's really, really special. I hope that it continues to open up doors for others, both in the professional setting but also players that want to play at this level.

**Q. Marissa, Mike White talked about how it's a huge advantage for Oklahoma to have the World Series in Oklahoma City. Having come here as a player, your thoughts on what you think of this kind of being the permanent site?**

MARISSA YOUNG: I'm sort of the one that looks at things of it's a game. The game doesn't know. We have to show up and be able to keep our composure and play great softball.

No secret, it's an advantage. A lot of these teams here, everyone but us, has been here before. That obviously works in their favor.

At the end of the day it's going to come down to how well we play and how gritty we are for seven innings.

**Q. For any of the players, not softball related, what has your favorite activity been in your pregame stuff so far?**

JADA BAKER: I guess we have like a couple of sophomores, four of them, they make raps. They do it every pregame. They always make it up. It's not the same thing any time. It's really fun and gets us free and not tight to start playing the game.

GISELE TAPIA: My favorite was probably by far going to the museum. I do have a couple of friends from other teams. Just seeing them, being able to interact with them and my teammates is such an awesome experience. I'm just so grateful to be here.

LILLIE WALKER: I think my favorite pregame activity is playing hacky sack. A lot of pitchers do it when our hitters

are hitting. Loosen up the muscles. Kind of fun. Kind of a silly game to play.

**Q. Coach, we talked about how it's only been seven years that the Duke softball program has existed. Not only being here for your first time, but also for the first time for the program, being part of a legacy like that.**

MARISSA YOUNG: I think the attitude, we weren't just happy to be a new softball program, we wanted to be great. We wanted to compete for championships from day one.

For us to win our first ACC championship in year four was really the foundation of that. Since then, every group has been on the mission to take the program to the next steps.

We definitely come into this College World Series with the same mindset. We're not just happy to be here for the first time. We want to win and we want to compete.

LILLIE WALKER: I think each and every year that we come, starting in the fall, we start to train, we're thinking how can we break through the next barrier that's been set by the people that came before us, buying into the culture they've instilled in this program.

Duke is excellent. Everything we do, we're breeding excellence, we're trying to maintain excellent culture at all times. I think like every time we come to practice, we want to make each other better, that's really what's propelled this program forward. It's the day-in, day-out training.

JADA BAKER: I will say we grind for sure. The biggest thing is building relationship. We're so close. We would honestly die for each other is what it feels like. I think having that is what helps us go so far.

GISELE TAPIA: Yeah, to touch on all of that, I think I've been here the longest. I'm a fifth-year. Being out here for the first ACC win and super regionals and regionals, I think going off of all of those wins but also all of the losses. We're a team that learns from failure. I think that's what makes us so resilient. That is the reason why we're here.

**Q. Coach, you played Oklahoma at the beginning of the year. Where have you come from as far as improvements since then? Where has the program come?**

GISELE TAPIA: Yeah, I think we joke a lot about we didn't have a lot of fans. One of our old players, she's a manager now, her grandparents were our only fans. Coming from that, we really had to work. We had to build this program. Those that came before me instilled a culture of

excellence, but also work ethic not only on the field but off the field.

Living that standard on and off the field allowed us to be great but also be willing to put in the extra that got us here.

MARISSA YOUNG: How we've grown as a team? So many ways. I think we've continued to develop the depth in our pitching staff. Jala and Cassidy have been phenomenal starters for us. Lillie Walker, in my opinion, is one of the best closers in the country, and she's done that all year for us.

Offensively what makes us special on any given day it's somebody stepping up in the lineup. Claire Davidson and Aminah Vega have been phenomenal all season long. On any given day, in super regionals it was D'Auna stepping up big or Frankie Frelick. Our team really thrives off that. We don't rely on one particular person to get the job done. It's next-man-up mentality. I think that makes us a really tough team to beat.

We've also found different ways to score runs. Even when we're down, we fight. We find ways to win. I think we've continued to develop resilience and be the team that finds a way to get the job done.

**Q. We got to hear Lillie's old memories of this event. Jada and Gisele, I'd like to hear some of your early life memories of maybe watching this on TV.**

JADA BAKER: I've never been to Oklahoma. Just being here and seeing the stadium is insane. Like I've never seen a softball stadium so big. I think it's going to be awesome to be in that environment and truly take it in, step back and not worry about softball for a second, take in how amazing it is to be here.

GISELE TAPIA: Some of my early softball memories were watching the College World Series. One of my favorite players was Sierra Romero and watching her perform on this stage, but also having Sydney Romero as a coach last year kind of intertwined. It's so amazing.

I can't thank my team enough for being able to get here, but also just the gratitude I have for my family and my parents, supporters. I think the biggest thing for me is that I made the little girl on TV, probably 12 years ago, so happy.

**Q. For a program doing this for the first time, was there a moment where you were like, Holy crap, we're actually doing this?**

LILLIE WALKER: I mean, yeah, I think it takes you back

for a second. I also think that, like, we had this goal in mind whenever we first started training in the fall. It's no surprise that we have the talent and we deserve to be here. We've gone through the adversity. We've stayed together even in the toughest of times.

I think, yeah, of course, the stadium is amazing, all the stuff we're getting is so great. But we have the talent. We're going to compete in this tournament.

MARISSA YOUNG: I think it's really cool from a coach's perspective, is to know along the year so many of them have heard that they needed to go somewhere else to get to this stage. They chose Duke not only because of the education but they believed in, even as a new program, we could do something special.

I'm just really happy for them that they're getting the best of both worlds to get the best degree in the country and also competing on the highest stage.

**Q. Lillie, you were playing softball somewhere else, but the tornado came through. Did it do any damage? Was your family affected?**

LILLIE WALKER: No. My family was not affected. But yeah, of course, prayers and thoughts go out to all those that were impacted by that. I know there were a lot of churches and people getting together to support that. Thankful for the community from Oklahoma. It's amazing to see.

**Q. Coach, take me through this process from the moment that the final out is recorded in Missouri, you realize what you've been building has gotten you to the World Series. A couple days later you got to turn the page and get ready for the World Series in Oklahoma City.**

MARISSA YOUNG: I think it started actually in the ninth inning. I decided to move from usually front of the dugout to the end of the dugout. Needed to find another spot to shake up the mojo.

The minute I sat down on the bucket, I said, You know what, God? I don't know how this is going to end, but I know You got us.

The next moment it felt like the pitch being delivered to D'Auna Jennings was in slow motion. We watched it leave the park. At that moment I knew we scored the one that was going to be enough. Thankfully we scored some insurance runs. It was incredible to see them rally and continue to fight through nine scoreless innings before they broke it open.

It was definitely that. Oh, my gosh, we've finally done what we've wanted to do the last couple years. It was heartbreaking not to get there last year when we thought we would.

This year definitely made it all the sweeter. Then, yeah, you wake up the next day and you look on the dresser, you're like, The championship pat is still there. This is real. You quickly have to flip the page and start planning for next steps, logistics of how to get to the World Series, then scouting report starts, prepping the team physically and mentally for what's to come.

It's been a tough balance of trying to balance enjoying the moment and what we've accomplished, but this group knows they are not done. They're hungry for more.

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

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