

# Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 8, 2026

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

## Iowa Hawkeyes

## Jan Jensen

## Ava Heiden

## Chit-Chat Wright

### Postgame Press Conference

UCLA 96, Iowa 45

THE MODERATOR: At this time we welcome Coach Jan Jensen and student-athletes Ava Heiden and Chit-Chat Wright. Coach, if you will make the opening statement.

JAN JENSEN: First off, major credit to UCLA, wire to wire, very impressive. I think the world of Cori and her staff. Just had them prepared and locked in and ready to roll.

What they've done this year has been extremely impressive. They were great today.

I also think you saw a lot of senior leadership on their end, a team that's been on a mission since the Final Four last year. They probably had a similar feel in their stomachs last year at the Final Four, which provided plenty of fuel for them this year with so much talent.

I think what you saw with the team with us, we got on our heels early. What you saw was, if you let that margin get a little too great, you can never really ever shrink it. Then with a younger team, which we're a lot younger than were older, it just got away from us -- mentally, emotionally, and certainly physically.

A lot of credit to them. I don't think I coached my best. I told the kids that. But I would hope that this loss does not define Iowa women's basketball season. I think they've been stellar all year.

I would say that I think anybody in the country, even though this ending, they still would have taken it. To be in a championship game in the premiere league, even though the way it ended wasn't great, what these people have accomplished with a lot of adversity -- Taylor McCabe got



hurt. She was my main outside scoring threat. Every play call was pretty much designed around her. We recalibrated, found a way to go on a winning streak, and end up in the big championship.

I'm really proud. Very disappointed, but more proud than disappointed.

**Q. To either of you, what do you guys feel you were able to prove on that round of the championship game?**

AVA HEIDEN: I think we were able to show our camaraderie as a team. Our program is built on blue collar plays and playing through assists and finding each other and sticking together.

So I think us being able to work our way up to this championship game was our demonstration of that.

CHIT-CHAT WRIGHT: I would just say just no matter the outcome, we just go out there, play our game, Iowa women's basketball. Whether we're up or down, and having that consistency as a team. Never shying away from the moment.

**Q. Ava, it's not easy going up against experience and height, but you still managed to be efficient, only missing four shots. What does that say about your relentlessness and approach to the game?**

AVA HEIDEN: I think it's a credit to my teammates. I can't get those shots -- on the block, I can't get those shots without Chat's passes or Taye Strem. That's just a credit to how good our team is at finding the post play.

Also, we've got some pretty great coaches. We've got Coach J, Coach Randi, Coach Lasondra. They're working us out, getting us better, and they really see the future, and they're striving to get us players to be the best we can be.

**Q. Chit-Chat, despite the loss, you all had a great season, and you had an amazing season yourself. What have you learned about yourself throughout this year?**



CHIT-CHAT WRIGHT: I would just say I've stepped into this leadership role. I knew that with coming here, committing that I would take on a bigger role, and just being a little bit more vocal. I've seen a lot of growth in that area. Just really stepping into that moment.

Even though I didn't knock down the shots and I really wanted to, just being able to take those shots and have pride that I'm going to make it and knock it down next time, that's something I've grown into as well.

**Q. Can either of you speak to Addie's impact, what she's been bringing to the team over the course of the past few weeks?**

AVA HEIDEN: Yeah, Addie is a great player. She has a really high clip at the 3-point line. As a freshman, it's hard to be thrust into a game where there's all this athleticism and strength and the pace of the game is quicker. So I think she's doing a really good job learning on the fly and getting better through that.

CHIT-CHAT WRIGHT: She brings a lot to the game, and I know a lot of people put -- there's a lot of pressure on her coming in as an McDonald's All-American, but she continues to work every day just as hard as everyone else, and it shows on the court as well.

**Q. For both players, can you explain what made UCLA's offense so difficult to stop?**

JAN JENSEN: I can take it. There's just not a lot of weaknesses. You can try to front Betts, and you can try to help off the corner, but they're going to find the person that's a pretty good 3-point scorer. Her sister coming in, you might have a little dropoff. What was she today, 7 for 8, right? They just don't have a lot of weaknesses offensively.

They can put it on the bounce. They can score interior. They can score at will. They can probably just throw it to Betts most of the time and score. And they have Kiki Rice, a premier point guard. So they just have a lot of weapons. They'll make you pay for a gamble, but you have to pick sometimes what you're going to do, if you're going to front, if you're going to play behind, if you're going to double. So they make you pay for that.

Then on top of it, typically you just make some mistakes in a game just because you're human. When you make a mistake on a closeout or we had a bad rotation, they're going to make you pay for it.

Also, we're pretty decent in transition defense. This was as

poor as I've seen us play transition defense this whole season, but I do think that is sometimes the mark of a younger team. You just can't reel it in mentally. You're just forgetting to hustle back. You have to take Kneepkens, even if you're a post player, because you know she's going to jack it. We just weren't as headstrong as we could have been. But it's just their depth.

If the pundits are right, they say they're all going to the league, right, which is pretty impressive. Most of us have one or two go, but they have a lineup like that.

**Q. Following what's happened these last few days in this Big Ten tournament, what is your message heading into the NCAA Tournament?**

JAN JENSEN: I think the big thing I have to do is make sure that everybody else is going to make a major deal about this, and I probably will too, but I can't let them because they've had a heck of a year.

It really wasn't our day. I don't think we should have lost by this margin. I really don't. We just let it get away from us, and that's on me.

I do think UCLA is very, very good. So we just have to take our licking, and we have to just understand that we played a great, great team, and we weren't nearly at our best, but I've got to focus on that glass that's half full because these guys did a lot of things this year that a lot of people didn't think they would ever do.

It's unfortunate this ending had to be quite so lopsided. But if you take that out of it, this team has really done a lot of great things. I hope we'll use this disappointment and make us better.

One of my favorite quotes is disappointments and setbacks make losers bitter, but they make winners better. I would just be surprised if this group didn't let it make them better.

**Q. You mentioned Kiki Rice earlier. From an opposing coach's perspective, what makes her so difficult to deal with?**

JAN JENSEN: She's just a three-level scorer. She's strong. She's big. She's tall. She's confident. She can defend full court. She can pull it behind -- you go below her ball screen, you chase over the top of it, she can get into the rim. She can hit a 3. It's not her favorite thing, maybe her strongest thing, but she can do it better than most people in the country.

She's just heady and a leader. Definitely a coach on the floor. She talks. She leads. She's calm. She's steady.

So that type of leadership, with everybody else they have, that's a pretty lethal leader.

**Q. Despite the result, this is the sixth time you guys have played in this game in the last eight years. Can you talk about what this means to you to be a staple at the top of the conference for so long?**

JAN JENSEN: Yeah, I think I am proud of that. We've had a lot of success in this tournament. It's hard to get here. It's just hard. March is fun; it's hard. Sleepless nights and quick adjustments.

I'm thinking about today we had that 8:00 shootaround, and we kind of polled our team and elected to get a little sleep. You just don't have time to go over different actions, so you kind of do it in the ballroom, right?

So you get here, and this will be one of Cori's best teams of her career, right I mean, she might lock up and reload, but this particular group is pretty stellar. I am proud of the history we've had. I certainly had a tremendous mentor, Lisa Bluder, getting us here, putting us in those positions, and obviously we got a few titles the last part of her career.

That's what I'm trying to do. Obviously I didn't do it today, but our motto is "blue collar, blue bloods," so we're trying to win those blue collar plays.

I like the makeup of our team, and I think we can keep us in that upper echelon.

**Q. Can you please speak to the growth that your freshmen and sophomore have gone through over this grueling Big Ten season?**

JAN JENSEN: Yeah, I think they've really, really been coming along. Chit-Chat Wright, we just didn't see as good -- you did a little bit last night, but I think she's going to really turn into something pretty special. I played her too many minutes and kept running things forward. She wasn't quite as effective as a shooter as she really can be.

But she's really grown by leaps and bounds. You think about a year ago, she was coming off the bench at Georgia Tech. I think she got a couple starts. Then she's been asked to kind of lead and take us through a program that's continuing to be on the rise, but I think she's really grown by leaps and bounds.

I think Ava Heiden, it wasn't her best performance today, but it's still 7 for 11 against Betts. We didn't make it so easy with her because our guards were facing so much pressure. That's why we really couldn't get a lot going. I just couldn't get our guards freed up to be able to get some

actions for themselves other than Chit-Chat.

But I think Ava, Taylor Stremlow, she had such a stellar game last night. She's got a lot of moxie, and she's really developed and come on. Journey Houston, boy, she's been -- she's definitely undersized today. She's been undersized most of the season, but she's the big reason why we got here. Addie Deal is a freshman, I think Chit-Chat said, that came in with a lot of fanfare and height, but you still have to adapt and understand the process is the process, and I think she's done that really beautifully.

Yeah, I'm pretty excited about the future. We've got a really great kid coming in out of California as a freshman. So I am really pleased with that.

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