

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship Final Four: Texas vs UCLA

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Phoenix, Arizona, USA

Mortgage Matchup Center

Texas Longhorns

Coach Vic Schaefer

Rori Harmon

Jordan Lee

Madison Booker

Semifinals Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Texas. We'll take an opening statement from Coach, then take questions for our student-athletes.

VIC SCHAEFER: Thank you very much. Thank y'all for being here.

First, just awfully proud of my team. They've been really special all year long. Navigated a very difficult non-conference schedule. We had some pretty significant injuries early to three of our players. We were able to navigate that non-conference schedule unscathed. Obviously living in the league in the conference we live in, they were able to handle that quite well. Obviously of late, they're playing so well.

This is a great group of young ladies. It's an incredibly competitive group. They have been nothing short of spectacular, especially the last two months. They're tough, they're competitive. They're really locked in. I felt this way for a while now. Especially when we got on the plane to go to the SEC tournament, just felt like they were on a mission.

I was just asked in another media, do I feel like being here last year, does it play a part, is there any difference in it this year with this group. I don't think there's any question it does. I think for our players, especially these three, they know exactly what they're getting into. I just think there's a maturity about them and a level of focus and concentration and confidence that they know what's at stake, they know what to do, what needs to be done.



That's how they've kind of been the last two months really. It's probably the best team I've ever had that is able to take a scout and in one day go and execute it. Obviously we have more than one day with this. Going through the SEC tournament, watch what they were able to do there in three straight days was really good. Go through the regional rounds that we've been in in the NCAA tournament.

Again, proud of 'em. I'm happy for 'em. When you get to this point in the season, y'all, there's been so much that you've gone through, you want 'em to be able to enjoy this a little bit. You just don't want to put 'em in a room, shut the door, not let them come out.

I do, I want them to enjoy this. This is special. It's hard to do. They've been able to do it back-to-back years. So for us, I think we've had -- just like we've been doing here for the last two months, we get Ice cream at night, we have a good team. When we get to the practice floor, we're locked in and have great laser focus.

It's a fun group, so... I'll open it up for you all.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for our student-athletes.

Q. Rori, looking back in your college career, overcoming injury, to playing in your second consecutive Final Four, which of your teammates and coaches do you give credit to? Madison, as you're playing your second consecutive Final Four, have you taken that day-by-day approach as well?

RORI HARMON: Yeah, I give a lot of credit to the whole university. It's not just, like, a few people I can pick and choose. Obviously it starts with my surgeon repairing my injury. From then, it's like my athletic trainer, teammates, Coach Schaefer, everyone down the line.

Of course, my strength coach during that time was excellent. I give him a lot of credit as well because he spent endless days and nights with me.

I'm just really grateful to be back in the Final Four two



years. I feel really healthy and excited for this opportunity.

MADISON BOOKER: Yeah, I just think for us being back here again in the Final Four, it's a hard task to do. But I think right now we're trying to take it day by day. I think being present where you are. I think also sitting back and looking back at what you accomplished this season, kind of saying good job to yourself.

Also I think switching onto the moment when you get to the practice court, or when you're watching film. It's time to plug back in and focus. We are here to do a job.

Yeah, I think it's a balance between telling yourself good job but also telling yourself it's time to work, it's time to win. So yeah...

Q. There was a sense that there was a shift from last year to this year. When did that shift happen or can you point to a moment or conversation that might have happened during the season that has you guys locked in as you are now?

RORI HARMON: I would say immediately after the season was over, we got to summer workouts, I think that shift happened then. Especially who we knew who we were getting, who was coming back. We realized this team is completely different than last year and the standard was definitely going to elevate.

I've been feeling like this team has been locked in from the get-go. We had some adversity with injuries throughout the season, losing a few games. Other than that, we've been able to respond really well.

JORDAN LEE: Definitely, to piggyback, especially off of what Rori said, it started with Coach Schaefer, what he did in building our roster in the off-season. If you look at some of the losses we had last year, some things we wanted to build off of and improve, along with the work ethic of Rori, Maddy, the rest of our team, just did a great job, and really taking advantage of the opportunities we had in the summer to work out together, build cohesion as a group, improve on some of those weaknesses. That's been our mindset since.

MADISON BOOKER: I think we increased that focus and mentality. Before the SEC tournament started, I think we knew that we had business, goals to achieve. We wanted to achieve it. We felt we were good enough to achieve it. I think that's what we really locked in, kind of paid attention more to film, scout and practice.

Q. Rori and Madison, y'all held Lauren Betts to low scoring in November. Is that a realistic goal tomorrow

night? What do you need from Brea and Kyla?

RORI HARMON: Yeah, that's a great stat, knowing that she is, like, on the top of our list when it comes to scouting.

It's kind of a team defense thing. The five players have a lot of the load. We talk about guarding 30 feet out from the rim, playing team defense, not necessarily just leaving it up to our five players to guard here her alone, but providing ball pressure, denying the floor, stuff like that.

Yeah, I expect a lot of great energy from Kyla and Brea to hold her down there. We'll do our part as the guards to help them out 30 feet out from the rim.

MADISON BOOKER: Yeah, Rori said everything correct. Literally everything Rori said we want to work on. Tomorrow, we want to play defense, post defense, 40 feet out from the rim, be physical when we're inside, for sure.

But yeah, we want to make it hard. Like, that's our identity. Our identity is defense. We want to make people play to their weaknesses.

Q. Rori, I know you said you've been locked in for weeks now. Do you ever take inventory of the sheer star power in this tournament with all the No. 1s? As a lover of college basketball, is that gratifying for you to be part of this?

RORI HARMON: Yeah, I'm super -- like, I'm super honored. Our team is really grateful to be just surrounded by great players and great coaches. Just great universities as a whole.

It's good to play against the best, to beat the best. We're going to take this opportunity and show what we can showcase in this tournament.

Q. Rori, in your time at Texas, the five years, have you noticed off-the-court changes in this tournament? You're making money for the school, do you notice things with the swag you get?

RORI HARMON: In the tournament, like this tournament or... ?

Q. This tournament.

RORI HARMON: Oh, uhm, I mean, it's not something I necessarily have to pay attention myself. I kind of let all of our other staff that's responsible for paying attention to that.

We're super grateful to get all the swag and to go to the



Tourney Town, stuff they give us in the locker room. We're super grateful.

I've noticed a change just in the stuff they give us. They give more. Obviously the further you go in the tournament, we realize you get more stuff.

No, I'm super grateful and I'm happy that we're receiving those items. That's not something I necessarily pay attention to. I'm just here to play basketball and win games.

Q. Rori and Madison, what we consider the WNBA's draft eligibility rules compared to the men's, they're quite different. The game is evolving in terms of development of players like yourselves. How do you feel about that rule? Would you like to be able to see talent enter the draft earlier?

RORI HARMON: I haven't really thought about that. I'm obviously like a fifth year. I don't know. Time in college is really grateful. That's where you build great relationships, build legacies, stuff like that.

I haven't really thought about, like, oh, you should be a freshman as a women's basketball player in college, you should be able to go to the league. I haven't thought that deep into it because the rules are the way they are.

Let's see what Madison thinks.

MADISON BOOKER: Oh, okay (laughter).

I have not thought about the rule at all. I mean, my mother, she's a teacher, she's always harped on education, get your degree at college.

But I have not ever thought about that. Thanks, Rori Harmon, for this (laughter). I felt the pressure. We love Coach Schaefer. I would love to stay all four years with him.

RORI HARMON: We think about what our future endeavors are going to encounter when the ball stops bouncing. Gratefully enough, I was able to graduate in three years and also get my master's degree from the University of Texas. I'm super grateful to have stayed a really long time.

Q. Rori has obviously been such a big part of this program, setting records, big recruit. What has she done in terms of setting the tone for the culture that you want to continue to have at Texas?

JORDAN LEE: First, just on the court we take a lot of pride

in our defensive intensity. That always starts with the point guard. Most of the time, especially at this level, we're playing against other great point guards.

Just her being able to take them out of their offense and establish pressure 90 feet from the rim is a huge part of what we do defensively. Second, I learned a lot about my work ethic from Rori. Coming out of high school, you're trying to establish habits in order to play, different things that you see that our coach expects of us. For her to show me how to do that early on was important.

Q. Madison, you all have really talked about being locked in and how important that's been. Something I've noticed is how much fun you're having, especially against Michigan. You all are just hyping each other up. Can you talk about the importance of that and how you bring that into this level of the tournament.

MADISON BOOKER: I just think, for one, I think it's so easy to kind of get, like, especially at this level, take basketball as a job. I think, like, any sport at this level.

I just think we as a team, we have done a great job kind of just going back on that, kind of taking it back as a kids sport. We all played when we were younger. We all loved the sport when we were younger. We had fun when we played when we were younger. When we did that, I think we seen, like, a higher level in our team chemistry and our sisterhood here.

Yeah, I think it really helps you play better. Especially here in March, I think it's the best time to play basketball. If you want to win, you play your best basketball at a high level, high energy.

We love supporting everybody on this team. We love when everybody gets their buckets, get theirs.

I think we're all a sisterhood. We all love each other. When we see our teammates thriving, I think it's a great thing to see.

Q. For whoever wants to answer, you're the only team in the Final Four to play, let alone beat, two other squads within the Final Four. What kind of edge do you think that competitive schedule brings you?

RORI HARMON: Yeah, it's great to be able to have that statistic that you just listed, which I guess there's only two of 'em, right?

I mean, like I said earlier, it's like to be the best, you have to play against the best. We're all here in the Final Four competing for a national championship. I think it definitely



gives some fuel for this run. Yeah, that's pretty much it.

Q. Rori, specifically about your three-point shooting, you have made that a major focus, you've elevated to 46% from three this year, seven for your last 11. How do you think you managed to reach that level in terms of your three-point shooting? Have you seen defenses change the way they are playing you as a result of it?

RORI HARMON: Yeah, I've seen a little bit of a shift. I think it just starts off from just getting in the gym consistently, which I really do. But also just having the confidence to do so.

My teammates and coaches, like, always instill confidence in me to do so. Sometimes it crosses my mind to not do it because I'm looking for the next open person because that's just what a point guard does and thinks.

Yeah, I think it's elevated a lot. It stretches the floor. Helps my other teammates out. Get driving lanes, whatnot, whatever the case may be.

Yeah, that's something I've definitely picked up and I'm going to continue to do because I think it does help our team.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, we are at time for you. We want to thank you for joining us this afternoon.

You ready, Coach?

VIC SCHAEFER: Those are some great kids, y'all. Man. You can do it a long time and not have three like those. I've got a whole locker room just like that.

Q. There's four No. 1 seeds. It's not easy obviously. It's not effortless. Is it harder than people maybe give credit for to have that level of excellence all season and to get to this point?

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, I'm going to tell you something. Winning is really hard. People think it's easy till it isn't. When it becomes isn't, that's when people lose their jobs.

To do it at the level that the four teams that are here have done it at this year, and really consistently. I think all four teams that are here, the only thing harder than building it is sustaining it. When you sustain it at the level that the teams that are here have done it over the period and the course of years, it's really incredible.

I have so much respect and admiration for the other three coaches, their staffs, their players because it is really hard. That's why I have so much admiration for my current team.

I mean, to know what they've gone through from a non-conference schedule, to do it with a seven-player rotation until we got kids back, then to live in the league that I live in in the Southeastern Conference, have to navigate a 19-game schedule, it's really, again, hard to do.

Again, it's just a different neighborhood, you know? I talk about it all the time. When you get those pre-season -- in September and October, when the pre-season rankings come out, you're looking for your team, there's certain teams you don't go past No. 10 to find them. You're always looking in that top 10, because that's where they live. 13 through 30 are real fluid. Man, that top 10, that's a distinct neighborhood.

What it takes to live there year in and year out, it's hard. I think that's what Coach was talking about, Coach Close was talking about a couple weeks ago. Man, she wasn't looking for any sympathy or anything. It's just a statement, man. It's hard. Winning at this level is hard. It is.

But when you're doing it like we're trying to do it, and that's the standard. That's her standard. It's all of our standard. For us, that's the way we choose to live. That's the way we choose to be in our profession.

So to do that, you know, it's hard. That's okay, by the way. It's okay to be hard. We accept that. It's fine. But yeah...

Q. Vic, the four teams here, there's been a lot of dominance, blowout wins. Obviously this weekend with the quality of opponents, that probably isn't going to happen. Do you worry about with your team the clutch gene kind of atrophying? Are you worried about tight moments at the end of games just because you haven't had that many recently?

VIC SCHAEFER: I don't. But I've got a fifth-year point guard. I've got Madison Booker who has been in those games and been to the war. I stopped worrying about this group about three, four weeks ago.

With what they've done and how they've done it, at some point you've got to step back and go, Okay, they're good. I've been telling them this now for a while. They're good enough.

Now, this time of year, you're in three two-game tournaments. It's single elimination. All it takes is one bad night. You have a bad night against any of these teams that are left, it ain't going to be good.

For this group, how they've gone about their business. I don't think we have any preconceived notion of what the score's going to be, whether it was in league, in our

tournament, or in the NCAA tournament. We just play. These kids just show up and play.

I think we're equipped to handle close games. We've certainly been in our fair share of those throughout the course of time, so...

Q. Your fourth Final Four. First time trying to get to a title in 40 years, trying to get a title. Do you have that '86 team ever talk to your team, support the team in any way? Second question, Geno talked about how the transfer portal was the death of mid-majors. Realignment has happened with conference. Do you feel like Texas moving to the SEC has strengthened your team, grooming them to get back here to the Final Four?

VIC SCHAEFER: I'm sorry. The first part? The first question?

Q. The first question was do you have the team from 40 years ago...

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, sorry.

That team has been around a little. Have they addressed my team? No. I have the luxury, the privilege and the honor of seeing Coach Conrardt a lot. We also have a spot in our gym that honors her as well as that team. I see it every day. I see it from the window in my office.

Again, for a Texas boy who grew up during that time, who was cutting his teeth in his first few years of coaching when that team was doing what they did, that's something that it doesn't go unnoticed by me or talked about.

With kids today, 1986, a long time ago, you know? But I think what they can relate to is being undefeated. They know how hard that is. So I think my team is reminded of it every day we go in the practice gym. I want them to be.

Booker is going to have a chance to be the all-time leading scorer in the history of University of Texas women's basketball, by the time they graduates. Rori Harmon is the all-time assist player and steals in the history of the university. When you think about those two statements, knowing the history of our school and women's basketball, the great players that we've had over the course of time, it's quite amazing, quite an accomplishment.

I'm awfully proud of both of them, as well as what we've been able to do in the six years that I've been there.

As far as the second part regarding the death of mid-majors, just talking about revenue share and things

like that?

Q. (No microphone.)

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, we've always recruited the way we've recruited, whether we were in the Big 12 or the SEC. I built my teams like teams that I had to go against as an assistant. Growing up, when I was back in '98 cutting my teeth in the SEC, in '97, '98, Coach Summitt had her dominating teams, I always said, Man, if I ever get to be a head coach, I want my teams to be like hers. I want mine to play like hers. I want 'em to be tough, physical, aggressive. Same with Coach Conrardt's. Used to have to look the part. When you got off the bus, you better look like that kind of team.

When I got the job at Mississippi State, we didn't have anyone that looked like an SEC player, much less was skilled like one. So we had to go recruit SEC bodies, frames, because if I was going to play like Coach Conrardt and Coach Summitt -- tough, physical and aggressive -- I got to get those kinds of players with those kinds of frames.

It's been something that we've always tried to do. Being in the SEC, there's two parts to that. One, it will get you ready if you can survive it. That's what people don't understand. You go through a 16-game schedule in my league, then go play three more games in the SEC tournament, if you can still stand, you got a chance to win right now in March.

There's a lot of teams that get beat up, kids get hurt. They don't have anything left in March. I think that's the thing I'm most proud of is that my teams in March always get better. We get better in February. We get better in March. We're not a staff that sits around on February 1st going, This is what we've got, let's try to make the best of it.

We keep working. We keep developing kids. We don't accept. If we think we can get better, we don't accept that, we want to get better.

I think that's where we've always been, is we just constantly keep working to get better. That's why we always seem to have pretty good success this time of year.

Q. I know you've been asked a lot about calling the team soft in February. You mention your teams getting better in February and March. When you said what you said, were you trying to send a message to the team to see how they would respond? If so, are you surprised they responded this way? Did you expect them to respond in this way?

VIC SCHAEFER: I think what everybody needs to

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

understand about that night that nobody talks about, two things. One, I give Vanderbilt tremendous credit that night. Even my own local media, I gave them tremendous credit. They played so well. Coach Ralph had her team ready to go. They absolutely played great.

Two, I said that night, and I say this all the time, you're either coaching it or allowing it. So what that means, and I said this, I'll fix it. It's my responsibility. I'm accountable. If I don't like the way my team's playing, it's my job to fix that. I said that.

So I was as much disappointed in myself that night as anything, that my team would show up that night and play the way they played. I was disheartened.

Was I disappointed in a lot of things? Absolutely. But here's the thing. I have the pleasure of knowing what you don't know. I see what you don't see every day. So in that moment, sure, y'all can take and run with whatever I said that night and turn it into however you want to, which you did, some of them did. That's okay. At the end of the day, they responded exactly like I thought they would. The character in my locker room, the young people...

I have an incredible group of young ladies. From that night till the next day in practice, how that practice went, the leadership that was in that room. Madison Booker's voice resonated in my practice gym that day. I've been really asking her for a while. To me that was the next step in her evolution as an All-American, to not only just be somebody that kids could see every day working, coming in early, spending time on her game, but stepping up and being that vocal leader, too.

From that day forward, she's been that. In that semifinal game in the SEC tournament, if you'll remember, Mississippi made a run at us to go into the fourth quarter. Before I could get in the huddle, Madison Booker was holding court. I didn't have to get in that huddle. I let her have it. I let her have the whole huddle. I didn't jump in there that time until the horn sounded. That's what you want.

Our kids have just been fantastic. But I think they grew from that night. They came to really understand. I think they always knew, Oh, Coach, he cares deeply, he wants the best for us, he's passionate. But after that night there was a different level that they understood about me. And you know what, that I understood about them.

Even as a parent I think know my kids. Every now and then my kids will do something, I'll go, Wow, I didn't really realize that about my son or daughter, in a good way.

The same thing happened that night with my team. After that night, that next day, the conversation we had in a room, just us, I think I came to have a much better and clearer understanding of my team, too, for the better.

This is the product that you have now. I mean, they've been at a way different level. You know what? I said this the other night. They've allowed me to really have the pure joy of coaching. Like, I'm having as much fun as I've ever had in my life. Not just because we're winning, but how we're winning, how we're playing, how these kids honor the game, how they respect the game. They respect their opponents. Their level of focus.

It's just what I envisioned that a team and a group of committed student-athletes should look like at the University of Texas.

Q. I'm going to take us off road a little bit for a second. What kind of empathy do you have for a veteran coach like Bill Fennelly, seeing sort of a large number of student-athletes move on? I don't want to get into specifics about student-athletes. But as a coach, that is something that you have to worry about now, a mass exodus, a couple of unhappy players and it's contagious?

VIC SCHAEFER: I mean, you're talking about somebody that's literally given his life to this game. It is hard. I'm obviously friends with Bill. His whole family has given so much to this game, to so many young women.

I don't know that much about it 'cause literally I try to stay off this thing this time of year, you know? Obviously my staff's pretty in tune with what happens minute-ly.

Yeah, it's just not the same. It's just not the same job it was five years ago, certainly not what it was 10, 15, 20 years ago. It's just way different.

You know, Coach Sark and I, we talked about it. We've been talking about it for a couple years now. Somebody stole our line that we've been saying for a while the other day, but it's so true. There was a thing called the dinosaur a while ago. What happened to them, they couldn't figure it out. What happened? They became extinct. We better figure it out or we're going to become extinct. That's just the way it is.

But the answer is yes. I'm so disheartened and disappointed, especially for him because I know what he's given to this game his whole life.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we are at time. I thank you for your time today. Wish you best of luck for tomorrow.

VIC SCHAEFER: Thank you all for covering our great game. Appreciate you being here. Praise the Lord and Hook 'em Horns.

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