

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

Thursday, April 2, 2026

Phoenix, Arizona, USA

Mortgage Matchup Center

**UCLA Bruins**  
**Coach Cori Close**  
**Lauren Betts**

**Gabriela Jaquez**

Semifinals Pregame Media Conference



you feel like a freeing aspect to it. Could you talk about why you wanted to do it, a bit about how difficult it was when you went through what you were doing in the hospital, now what I'm assuming is a freeing feeling.

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I mean, I think kind of like you said, I think it takes a lot of that weight off your shoulders once you finally are just honest with everyone on how you're doing. I feel like it really helped that I already came out with the ESPN article last year. I feel like I've kind of gotten that off my chest. It nice to see the progress I've had in the past year.

I mean, I think for me, like I talked about in the article, having conversations with my mom, I just feel like for me, basketball and this platform that I've been given, I was put on this earth to do more than play basketball. I think the journey I've had, the hardships I've went through are to help other people.

I don't know. I feel like I've been given this opportunity to help so many little girls who don't have a lot of people to look up to that look like me. Specifically maybe like tall girls who deal with a lot of the same stuff I do, I think it's really special that they can feel seen and heard, that they're not alone in this. That regardless of what other people make you out to be, how you feel about yourself at certain points in your life, you're still special and you matter. There's so many people out there that love you. I think that was the biggest reminder I needed at that age.

Yeah, for anyone who battles mental health issues, your story matters. I feel like, especially with athletes, it's not something we have to shy away from, it's something you can be up front about.

**Q. Lauren, obviously you began your career at Stanford for a season. There's a lot of talk nowadays about the good and the bad of the transfer portal. From your perspective when you reflect on the past four years, what was the decision you made to come to UCLA?**

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I mean, I always talk about

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by UCLA. We will start with an opening statement from Coach.

CORI CLOSE: Thank you, guys, for being here. I am always just really amazed at how many people have contributed to our game being where it is right now. You all are a big part of that. So just thank you for the sacrifices, for the storytelling, for the persevering to really tell the deserved stories that these women have. Just thank you for that.

We're excited. We're excited for the opportunity to play Texas. I'm really confident in our team and how we're going to be ready to compete. But the bottom line is you have to show up and be the best versions of yourselves under the things that are under your control and take care of business.

But we're really excited to be here.

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

**Q. Lauren, I've asked other people about this, Dawn Staley, Vic, they've been talking about you talking about yourself in The Players' Tribune. They've all been quite touching comments about it. They've been impressed, said you're doing good things for people. I want to know, obviously you thought about doing this for a while, what prompted you to finally decide to do this? How do you feel now that you've done it? Sometimes everyone has nervousness in their lives, and once the nervousness goes away, once you've done it, sometimes people say that was pretty good,**

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coming to UCLA has been the best decision I've ever made. My only reasoning really to come to UCLA was because I just wanted to be happy at the end of the day. I wanted to be surrounded by people who had confidence in me, who could make me better as a person on and off the court.

Yeah, UCLA has changed my life for the better. I've gained a certain level of confidence. I've done things that I never thought I'd be able to do my freshman year. The amount of experiences I've had, people that I've met here, have been amazing. I'm just super grateful.

**Q. Lauren, the rematch against Texas, they expressed a surprise to be able to hold you to eight points. What did you see from going through that film? How do you plan to attack it differently?**

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I think the biggest difference looking back at the film is just creating opportunities to get the ball as much as I can. I think just creating easier catches. They're really amazing defensive team. I think as the guards are getting pressured on the perimeter, just trying to become so open that they just can't like not give me the ball. I think trying to help out my teammates as much as I can. It's not one person versus Texas, it's a full team. We as a team are trying to beat them.

I think, yeah, just coming out with a certain level of aggression is going to be really important. I'm going to make sure I do that from the very beginning.

**Q. Lauren, you previously said that you watched last year's Final Four about 10 times to fully understand how it happened. Did that serve as motivation for you through the season? Now that you're back here, what was the biggest takeaway from watching?**

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I think just coming out with a certain level of confidence. I think being there before and having that experience, now we know what to expect. At the end of the day, like, our senior season is on the line. We want this so bad.

I think the amount of confidence that we have in each other to go out and compete from the very beginning, that's the biggest difference. I know that we're going to be ready tomorrow. So I'm really excited for that.

But yeah, I don't know, I think for me it was like motivating. I knew I just wanted to get back here again. This is not the end goal. We want to keep playing two more games. We're just really excited to compete.

**Q. Gabriela and Lauren, I'm curious when it comes to**

**the draft eligibility rule in the WNBA, it has largely led to players like yourselves going off four years in college. Had that rule been different, is that something you maybe would have entertained? Do you see, as the game shifts, any value? Do you think there's any reason for that rule to shift? Would you have pursued it had it been different?**

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: Me personally, I would just say I would probably have stayed at UCLA all four years just 'cause developmental-wise. I just needed the development.

Also I think getting a degree from UCLA is something I wouldn't want to pass up on. I just really enjoy the college experience.

Playing four years at one school, you develop a community. The fans. I think that's what people connect with women's basketball about is the players can usually stay in college for a really long time, so they kind of build connections that way.

Yeah, for me personally, I would stay all four and do it like how I did.

LAUREN BETTS: Same. Same. Same exact answer (smiling).

**Q. Coach Close talked about the best version of yourself tomorrow night. You can't lock in tonight. You can't lock in until game time. What do you do individually, Gabriela and Lauren, to get away from the game without getting distracted?**

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: For me, I know that it's really good to not think about the game too much. When I'm in basketball, when I'm in film, I'm definitely thinking about it, preparing well. When it's time for that, I'm doing it.

For me personally, I know we say obviously it's the Final Four, but it's what we do. It's another basketball game to play together. Just do what we've been doing all season.

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I think when we're in the hotel, just relax, get yourself mentally prepared. But like Gab said, I don't try to think about the game too much. I just like spending time with my teammates. We're all friends at the end of the day. Most of the time we're not even talking about basketball.

**Q. Gabriela, reflecting on those four years at UCLA, how has the experience been growing under Coach Close? How do you feel her leadership style and the way she's been able to encourage you guys but also**



**push you guys, how has that affected you?**

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: Super grateful that I got the opportunity to come to UCLA. My dream, play under Coach Cori. I definitely learned a lot. I've grown so much.

I'm just super thankful. Like Lauren said, we got to do so many fun experiences. I've really got to see the world with this team. I wouldn't be the person or player without Coach Cori and our team and our staff.

Just super thankful. I just want to play more games with these girls.

**Q. Coach talked about coming out and being the aggressor in this game, imposing your will. Easier said than done, right? What does that process entail?**

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I mean, I think tonight I think you have to have the mental reps almost. It's just like getting yourself to a level where you're feeling at your best and you want to feel confident.

We do honestly a lot of mental toughness work here as well. It's kind of impossible not to. We have Coach T. We actually did one before practice today, and I'm sure we'll do one tomorrow before the game.

We talk about keeping your circle small, having a will that whatever happens during the game you're going to get the job done, regardless of how you feel. There's going to be state change. You have to remember what we're trying to do at the end of the day.

I think good warm-ups, as well. We want to make sure from the very beginning, as soon as we step on the floor, regardless of whether we're playing or not, we want to have amazing talk, amazing energy.

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: Just to make sure our preparation is where it needs to be, we're in the mindset to come out and dominate.

**Q. Gabriela, when the team played Texas earlier this year, you struggled and ended up losing by 30. What is it going to take to -- my mistake. You still lost. It was the only loss you guys had. What is it going to take to beat Texas after losing to them earlier this season?**

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: For us, just like we've been saying, coming out ready to dominate. I think that's the big one. Coming out ready to play. Coming out to get every loose ball, creating catches, playing as a team. Just play like we know how to play. Play confident.

**Q. Lauren, I think in three of the first eight games, Oklahoma, Texas and Tennessee, you probably didn't get quite as many touches as the team wanted you to. Then that changed completely. Did anything in particular change after that? Was that stuff that you talked about in terms of making sure you did get the ball?**

LAUREN BETTS: I think it's just reps in practice, just working on that chemistry between me and the guards.

I think for me, coming out with a certain level of aggression that I'm going to get the ball regardless of how teams are playing us. I think throughout the season I've just worked harder and harder on that. The scout team has done a really good job of not taking it easy on me. They make it hard for me to create catches. I have to do it anyway.

I think just getting those reps in, I've gotten so much better throughout the season.

**Q. You're on a team full of people who played other sports in the past. Why basketball became the love? How the other sports you played helped you and continue to help you.**

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: Fun question.

I think all of us, yeah, we really enjoyed playing other sports. For me personally, I grew up playing softball a lot. I definitely appreciate the opportunity that I got to play with the UCLA softball team, their World Series run. That was a lot of fun.

Playing softball helped me a lot. It helped me get a break from basketball, hang out with my other friends, do something fun.

I think that is important. They're close friends of mine. They didn't play basketball. When I got to play softball with them, I had a lot of fun.

I grew up playing soccer as well, I did a little bit of dance. I tried volleyball. I did a little bit of track.

It's just important that young kids try multiple sports. It doesn't need to be so serious so quick. You're only a little kid for a little bit. It's important they try all sports. When I started to play basketball, I just really fell in love with it. I love the pace. I love that they gave full-ride scholarships. I just really fell in love with it. I'm really glad I chose to play basketball in college.

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I mean, I think I started playing

basketball because of my dad. I mean, I've grown up traveling around Europe just watching my dad play professionally for so long. I did soccer growing up. That was just not a good idea on my part.

Then I did swimming for a long time, competitively. I loved it, but it was really tough waking up at like 4 a.m. for meets, then going to play three AAU games back to back. My dad was like, You should probably play basketball. I started doing workouts with him. I love it. I've made so many friends through basketball. I wouldn't change it for the world.

Like Gab said, playing so many different things, growing up doing so many things is just so much fun as a kid. And I've made so many friends throughout it. And not taking it so seriously, like Gab said. It's meant to be fun at the end of the day. That's why we all started playing basketball, is honestly just because it was really fun, so...

**Q. Lauren, this year we've got five starters all seniors or graduate students. Is there a pressure with the every game possibly being your last?**

LAUREN BETTS: Can I go first? Just so everyone here knows, I went to class with him. He was in my AP stats class. This is insane. I'm so happy you're here (laughter). This is so awesome.

Yeah, I mean, I think in the back of our heads, we all know that this is our last go at this. It's all or nothing for all of us.

I think throughout the season, we've also learned that we just want to enjoy the journey with all of us together. We don't want to worry so much about what ifs, the end. We just really want to focus on just the joy and the fun that we have.

We've gotten so close throughout the season. I think when we do play, especially around this time, you can see throughout March Madness, we come out with a certain level of urgency because it is our last year.

I think tomorrow we're going to come out with that same level of urgency from the very beginning.

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: Yeah, we're just fighting for more days with each other at the end of the day.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, thank you for your time today.

We'll continue with questions for Coach Close.

**Q. The tournament has grown in the last five or six**

**years. Talk about the growth from the time when it was in the bubble. The transfer portal, you have made a success story of it with the kid you've gotten. How that might have changed, getting kids that are from Power Four as opposed to plucking mid-major things?**

CORI CLOSE: I think you can obviously do it either way. I think I'll go the transfer one first, then I'll back up.

I think there's really good reasons to transfer. I think sometimes we go, Oh, this transfer portal era. Obviously there's been challenges. I do think there needs to be better structure. But obviously I'd be a hypocrite not to say that we've really been strategic. We're actually in the process right now of preparing to be very strategic in the portal.

I think really it depends on whether or not -- it just happened to be the right fit, whether or not they're Power Four or really good mid-major players. Across the country in this tournament, you have seen you can be a great contributor from either direction of that.

We have been a really good transfer destination. We have been very intentional about how we've integrated that into our recruiting.

In terms of the growth of the game, I couldn't be prouder. I was in the bubble when it got exposed, some of the differences. Now March Madness for the women is just normal now. Everything that's in our locker room today when we walked in the arena or when we got to the hotel is the same as what the men were.

I don't take that for granted. That was a costly change. That was an intentional change. We're in a new TV deal. I still think we can make another step in that and really let women's basketball stand on its own. Everything from viewership, corporate sponsorship, all those things throughout the year. I saw a stat about what an ad space costs for the Final Four. I'm just excited, and we got to keep our foot on the gas.

**Q. As the seniors take the court for the final time, what type of advice would you give this team as they head on to play in the professional level, specifically the WNBA, to build on their draft stock as well?**

CORI CLOSE: Well, I think at this point it's really just about enjoying their journey. The preparation they have is the preparation that they have. I've been doing this for 33 years. This is the most intentionally hardworking group of people in terms of being prepared for the pro level, as well as being prepared for our team, that I've ever worked with.



I really am not worried at all. I don't give it a second thought because they are going to enter into their pro situations and people are going to be like they know how to work, they know what it takes to be a pro. That's like the easiest question ever because I'm like, they're ready.

**Q. When it comes to the NCAA tournament and whether it's the regional format thing or even something like choosing referees and officials for the national championship, the Final Four...**

CORI CLOSE: Are you trying to get me in trouble (smiling)?

**Q. Do you think the coaches, the WBCA, should have a bigger say in how some of those things play out in the NCAA tournament, rules, selection?**

CORI CLOSE: I do think when you have balanced representation in decision-making bodies, you usually end up in a better place. I think it would be wise if we took a step back. Where are we? How are our structures working? What adjustments need to be made to just enhance it?

You get in trouble when you make big swell swoops about this is terrible, let's just change it all. I think there's a lot of good that's happening right now.

I've been on the women's basketball oversight committee. I've been about some of those different changes. I do think we could have a little more strategy on who's making some of those decisions and how changes can be made.

I think that would be a reasonable expectation.

What was the other part of your question?

**Q. Just in general, not only the regional thing, but selection of officials.**

CORI CLOSE: Yeah, I think I'm a big strategic planner. If there's something that doesn't have transparency in how the process goes, if it doesn't have principled things that you can go back to, like these are our guiding principles, these are the things that are going to make it so that it doesn't have to do with who you know or how many times you've had them in a particular conference or something like that.

I believe everybody that's working on these committees, every official, is really intentionally invested in our game. That goes without saying.

That being said, I think it's always good to go, is the system

we have leading us to where we want to go. I do think there's some adjustments to be made.

**Q. Last year you guys at the national semifinals didn't play anything like yourselves. I think you said you barely recognized the team. What did you say after a few days to maybe not let that be such a shadow over a great season? How different maybe do they feel this year that this is not a new experience being at the Final Four?**

CORI CLOSE: Yeah, I guess talking transparently, I did a crappy job as a leader. The moment we touched down, I was in transfer portal. Not a great situation.

One of my biggest regrets of last spring is I didn't celebrate them enough. I didn't find ways to go, This team was the most, at that point, successful team since 1978/'79. I let myself get wrapped up in everything that was transpiring in the portal. I don't think I did a good enough job in that way.

Good news is they're very mature and they have a really good sense of what our culture is, what we expect. Actually when the dust settled and we got back together, we were able to self-reflect and we were able to realize that we were building off of something really good, that there was a lot to celebrate but also a lot to build from.

I do think then at that point we were able to do a really good job of saying hey, look at what position we're in now. We can actually use that as such a great teacher for where we want to go this year. I really did think it ended up serving us really well.

**Q. Circling back to the WNBA draft eligibility. As the landscape shifts, there's more discussion being had about how that rule could potentially shift in the future. In your opinion, it's not a matter of if, but rather when? How do you think that would impact the women's college game? Are you ready for that rule to change?**

CORI CLOSE: I'm not. I'll tell you why. I just think one of the reasons that our game has grown so much in the last several years is that between the transfer portal, between one-and-dones on the men's side, fan bases don't have the same connection because they have a double whammy.

We both have the same transfer portal situation, but we don't have that rule in our game, so we have a higher percentage of people that stay in their communities, they stay at schools for four years. We had Lauren for three and Gabriela for four, when I look at the way our fan base feels connected to them.

But I also think in just the preparation to be quality humans.

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I go back to why at the beginning of time did we think it was worthwhile to give full athletic scholarships. It's because we knew it was so formidable in terms of leadership, self-esteem, character development, preparation for life. I think we've seen that just because you can make a lot of money in the NBA really quick doesn't mean you're prepared for life or to handle it.

Maybe I sound old school. I really am a person that's usually like you have to pivot with whatever the landscape is. In this case I hope we hold onto that as long as we can.

**Q. The women's game overall doesn't have as much portal movement as the men's game does. Do you think that's mainly a financial issue? If so, how much does that weigh on you making sure that you have enough NIL money to make this go?**

CORI CLOSE: Oh, it weighs on me a lot. I think you have to be at a certain baseline to be able to compete for the top transfer kids that are in there. So that has actually been one of the things I've struggled with the most in this new era. My job is to lead us. That's the way I'm willing to pivot, for instance. But it is like another full-time job.

I am much more like a CEO than I am just like a head coach. I have to balance that. How do I stay principled-centered, but how do I -- my staff is like we know these calls are pointless if we're not at a certain level.

We've worked our tails off this year to be ready, especially in a year like this where we're probably going to get five transfers, you better be doing a lot of work on the financial side of things.

I just think it is what it is, but it has definitely doubled my job description.

**Q. Last week Coach Geno was asked about how Title IX is impacting women's sports if at all. I wanted to know your thoughts on that, especially with NIL.**

CORI CLOSE: It's interesting. I remember when the rev share conversation was being had. For most of the conversation, it was like, Oh, we fully expect Title IX to be included in that. Then the judge made a decision on back pay, not even current. It was like, Oh, we'll just got with that.

It was amazing how quickly that conversation shifted. I just wonder how we justify that in what we're seeing in the growth of not just women's basketball, but women's sports, how it's affecting that.

I think it's worth revisiting. I do agree with Geno that it's

hardly ever talked about right now. When you're talking about Title IX on campuses, you're mostly talking about sexual harassment cases. You're not talking about gender equity and opportunity. The combination of that shift along with the rev share conversation, that most teams are anywhere from -- I'm talking about the Power Four level, anywhere from 2% to 7% on the really high end of that.

With where we are in women's basketball, what we're bringing from a business standpoint, that wasn't the case 15, 20 years ago. Title IX being valued more than now seems to be out of whack, so...

**Q. How cool is it to obviously be in the Final Four, but in the West Coast? All those years battling in the Pac-12, these first two years just adjusting, night after night battles that you had, how has it benefited you in the Big Ten?**

CORI CLOSE: I think I've been really fortunate. How lucky am I that I've been the head coach of two amazing women's basketball conferences that are committed to women's basketball. Not everybody was for a long time. I've gotten to be a part of the Pac-12, being a part of that, really am thankful for the coaches that invested and grew me. Being a part of great leadership that really cared.

I remember a phrase that I got in the Pac-12 is: we need to move women's basketball to be an asset worth investing in and a product worth investing in, not a Title IX box to check.

I loved that. I feel like we're experiencing that. We are a darn good investment now. I really learned that in the Pac-12. They led in that area.

Now being in the Big Ten, I think resource-wise, exposure-wise, commitment-wise, I think they're leading the way nationally. There is not another conference I would rather be a part of from a women's basketball perspective. So I just am humbly thankful.

**Q. I was at the Fort Worth regional, and your comments about coaching being really hard, really resonated with a lot of the coaches there.**

CORI CLOSE: Some. Some thought I was crazy (smiling).

**Q. In different ways, I would say, in terms of saying that nobody's feeling sorry for us to saying I know exactly what she's talking about. What has the response been for you to those comments? How do you feel like that's resonated? Is there anything you want to clarify?**

CORI CLOSE: Well, we're all in this really competitive environment right now, so I try not to take anything -- I just think any comments are good comments. That means people are invested and they're paying attention. I think that goes with the territory.

What I was trying to say is that we need to protect trying to keep really good coaches in our game. The reality is, whether you agree with it or not, some of these changes have made it a lot harder for a lot of people.

I am not afraid of hard work. Let me clarify that. I value also the other people, the support staffs, the ushers, the publicists, fill in all the blanks, the assistant coaches. I really value that. There's a lot of people in the village of growing our game that are really important.

That being said, I think we have seen it from the Jay Wrights to the Tony Bennets. I was talking to Katie Meier. I talked to Muffet McGraw. I talked to a lot of people.

If we're going to grow our game, they talked about it a lot in the WNBA, the quality of coaches keeps going up in terms of how they're able to grow it.

I think in college, if we want it to continue to grow, we got to really protect people that love teaching it, that can stay principled-centered.

I think the thing we hear all the time is it's just so different than what we signed up for. It doesn't mean we think it's all bad. It doesn't mean we're afraid of hard work. It doesn't mean that we don't think there's some incredible things in this new landscape.

I think NIL is an incredible thing. Should have been done 20 years ago, but in a better infrastructure, in my opinion.

That being said, it's just been really difficult. I don't believe in the 'balance' phrase very much, but I do believe in staying principled-centered and remembering my 'why'. That has been challenging the last couple of years.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, want to thank you for your time today.

CORI CLOSE: Thank you to all of you.

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