

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship Final Four: UCLA vs South Carolina

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Phoenix, Arizona, USA

Mortgage Matchup Center

UCLA Bruins

Lauren Betts

Finals Pregame Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Lauren Betts. We'll get started with questions for Lauren.

Q. How is your head feeling this morning?

LAUREN BETTS: Feels fine, yeah. Thank you (smiling).

Q. Any preparations of those dances that you guys have been making? Any dance that you're looking forward to doing tomorrow?

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I mean, I'm not trying to jinx anything, but I'm sure you'll see lots of dances from us. I wouldn't be surprised if this pops up tomorrow. I'm very excited.

But yeah, just trying to stay as present as possible. But I'm sure there will be lots of dance celebrations.

Q. What do you recall about the last time you played South Carolina? How do you expect things to change tomorrow?

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I mean, they're an amazing team. They play really aggressive. They work really well together. They're scrappy. Last time we played them, I just remember as a post just having a big job defensively, having to get their post out of the paint. Rebounding is going to be huge, trying to limit them to one shot.

Same kind of goal with this game. Coming out with an aggressive mentality from the beginning and playing really hard for 40 minutes.

Q. Coach Close has been such an advocate of this game. What would it mean for you guys to finish the job for her tomorrow?

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I mean, it would mean everything, not just for her but for our entire program. To be here is amazing, but we don't just want to end here. We want to make sure we finish the season off the right way. I know the coaches are going to work really hard to prepare us for that. Us as a team, we're going to make sure we are mentally locked in going into tomorrow. This is a huge opportunity for us. I'm looking forward for another opportunity to compete.

Q. When you think about UCLA, you think about success in basketball, but it's been since 1978 that y'all have won. Since 1995 that the men have won. What would it mean to bring a national championship back to this fan base?

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I mean, I don't think I can even put it to words like how much it would mean for everyone, their families, this program, the alum. We have all of Westwood backing us up right now. It's just really special to see all the support that we've had this entire tournament.

To bring it back would be like a dream come true for all of us. Thinks the goal we've had from the very beginning. It would mean everything.

Q. (Off microphone) was in the crowd yesterday, I'm sure she will be there tomorrow. What does it mean to have a role model like that, someone who has been in this situation before, watching?

LAUREN BETTS: She's amazing. I mean, she's one of the G.O.A.T.s to ever come through here. She's been supporting us throughout the entire season. She sends us texts in our group chat after every game. To have someone like that who is such a role model to give us support, give us great advice, it's huge. It's people like that to get us through the season.

To have her at this event is truly special.

Q. What is the best piece of advice she's given you?

LAUREN BETTS: Man, she always talks about team, team, team. Like, she honestly has never really given me



any, like, crazy individual advice. She's constantly just reminding us of how meaningful it is to really play as a team, how much better off you'll feel knowing that, like, you left everything out on the floor.

She's, like, after every single game, I always wanted to look back and know I was the best teammate and I did everything I could, I left it all out on the floor. I think that's the biggest piece of advice we're taking with us.

Q. Third double-double in March with this past game. How do you keep it going and still be dominant in these big-time games?

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I mean, for me, I don't really look at it as pressure. I think just going out and just competing. My biggest mindset going into every single game is just rebound and play defense and the points will come.

I have no doubt that my teammates are going to try to find me. But I think when I do my job on the defensive end, that really gets me going.

Just showing up and playing for my teammates, knowing what I'm playing for, why I'm doing this at the end of the day, that's what's going to help me going into this championship.

Q. Can you talk about the relationship you have with your sister and as a teammate.

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah our relationship is really special. She's like my best friend, to be honest. She's not just my little sister. I mean, we really get on each other, we know each other all the time, we bicker. I mean, the love for each other, it's really strong.

It means a lot to me to be playing in a national championship with her. That's an opportunity that a lot of people don't get. To have this experience with my own family and getting to do all of this, just knowing at the end of the day I always have someone who's going to have my back and they'll be able to talk to you about everything, it means the world to me.

Yeah, she's amazing. I'm always going to be her number one fan. I can't wait to see how she continues this legacy at UCLA. I'm just so proud of her.

Q. This is your last game that you're going to be with Kiki. How does it feel to have that time spent and learn from her, the chemistry you built over the years?

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I mean, it's crazy. I try not to even think about that because it makes me sad. I'm trying

to stay positive and focus on this next game.

Yeah, I mean, not just Kiki. All of the seniors, knowing that is our last game together, it means a lot. The journey that we've had together... We've helped each other throughout our toughest times, built each other back up. We've worked so hard to get here. For me, it's not really about the wins and the losses, it's about this entire journey that we've had together. These girls are my best friends, they're Meyer sisters. I'd do anything for them.

We've created a legacy at UCLA. I'm just hoping to continue that legacy.

Yeah, I mean, it's kind of bittersweet. I really wish that I could have, like, a thousand more years with them. They're amazing.

Q. Tomorrow could be your last college game. As you compete for the title, you spent the last four seasons at UCLA. During those four seasons, you've experienced ups and downs. How can you leave a lasting legacy? What is one thing or more that you have learned while playing with your team?

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I mean, I think this team has already created a legacy in itself. Tomorrow would just be obviously the cherry on top.

For me, I want to leave this season knowing I left it all out on the floor. I want to play hard for 40 minutes. Regardless of the outcome tomorrow, I want to know in the back of my head that I gave everything to this team and this program. Tomorrow my mindset is just being a leader, being vocal, giving everything, leaving this game empty, regardless of how I feel.

But yeah, I think the biggest thing that I've learned in these past three seasons at UCLA, for me just to always believe in what I'm capable of doing and to surround myself with good people. Regardless of what I do on the court, that doesn't take away from my value as a person. I have people who love me regardless of how many points I score. Yeah, that's the biggest lesson I've learned.

Q. I love that T-shirt. Can you talk a little bit about the joy that you found this season doing things like your dance routine, being a cheerleader. Seems like you have a lot of fun.

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, we do. I think this is I always say my favorite season I've ever had at UCLA. Honestly, it's not just because of all the basketball. I mean, like the amount of random things that we've done as a group has made it so enjoyable.

I mean, yeah, Char did a little collab with the dance team for her YouTube channel. I got to be part of it. Thank God it was the most enjoyable experience I've had ever. It was so fun. I mean, I'm sure everyone has seen, we've done it after a lot of games.

I mean, yeah, I think it just speaks to, like, this group. We just really enjoy each other. We just want to make it fun. Yes, we're obviously very serious and we like to compete and win games. But you can also enjoy the journey as well.

Yeah, I just really love this group.

Q. What kind of a role did sacrifice play between the team this year?

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I mean, I think that's key to this team. You look at every girl on this team, they could go to any team that they want and average however many points they want.

I think to really sacrifice yourself and your ego and be able to put that aside for a bigger purpose. I think when you're in moments like this, it makes it all worth it. This is what we wanted. This is why we all came here. Especially for this core group of people to come back and to believe in what we wanted to do, it's amazing.

I think I'm really happy, I'm just really thankful for Coach Cori and the way she's continued to push that message, the way we've all bought into it because it's not easy, but it makes it all worth it at the end of the day.

Q. Cori talked so much about the big picture, being an advocate for the women's game, saying she wanted to apologize for the offense. Do you think of yourself as representing all of women and women's sports? Is that something you carry with you on the court?

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I mean, I think I'm always trying to represent myself in the best way possible. I think I represent a lot. I think I represent, for me, I've always been really vocal about women's sports, mental health, being an advocate for that. I think every time I step out on the floor, I remember that it's not just about me. Every time that I speak to media, I remember that it's not about me. Just continuing to try to grow the game in any way that I can.

I think Coach Cori has always done a good job of reminding us of that, that it's bigger than ourselves. I think that's what makes UCLA so special, this program, that we're constantly doing things to help the community, to help the game. I think that's what's so special about this

group.

Q. What have you learned about yourself in this tournament that you didn't know about yourself back in November?

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, man, I think when things get tough, I'm able to persevere and fight through. I think throughout the season there's lots of outside noise and opinions that could have gotten to me at a time like this when it's so crucial and layers lots of pressure.

I think the way I approached this tournament, I feel very levelheaded. I'm not getting too hard on myself, I'm not thinking about what people have to say about me before or after the game. I'm just staying very neutral and present, focusing on myself and that inner circle. I think it allows me to show up and compete and do what I need for my team. I could really care less what people have to say about me. I'm just trying to win games.

Q. You were talking about women's sports. So many great strides have been made. As you leave, what is the next mountain to climb for women's basketball, the industry?

LAUREN BETTS: Well, I mean, a huge one was just climbed recently, so that's been really big. Obviously I'm really grateful for all of the players that made those commitments and those sacrifices for people like me who are entering the W next year. I mean, that was huge. I don't take that for granted. I'm so thankful.

We don't like to talk about that a lot because we try to keep very present and focused. I mean, that's amazing. I'm just very, very grateful for all the hard work that went into that, so very excited.

Q. South Carolina is obviously a very good team. What's the key to beating them tomorrow?

LAUREN BETTS: Man, yeah, I mean, at the end of the day it's the national championship, so it's not going to be an easy game. We're going to have to go into it and really give everything that we possibly can for 40 minutes. There's no letting up.

I think against a team like that, it's going to be about our aggressiveness, on both ends of the floor. Offensively not letting them take us out of our game, finding each other when we need to. Defensively limiting them to one shot and rebounding. I don't care how many rebounds we all get, as long as we get the boards, we just need the rebound at the end of the day.

Q. Tomorrow you do get the matchup against another post player. How do you feel about that matchup? How do you feel the evolving post players today?

LAUREN BETTS: I think it's really cool. I love to see the growth in the postgame, especially because, I mean, I feel like I consider myself a pretty, like, old-school kind of post. I think it's really cool to just see the development and how hard we worked to get to where we are.

I'm excited for tomorrow's matchup. I think it will be really fun. Yeah, I mean, she's an amazing post. I know I'm going to have to work really hard for the entire game.

Yeah, I mean, I think throughout the season I've had to match up with a lot of amazing posts. I do in practice every single day. I feel like the work that got me to this point will help me tomorrow. I'm just really excited to compete.

Q. Last night you were able to shut down Madison Booker, took her out of her game. They did say in the press conference it felt like having a 6'7" person hurt them. Talk about being in control underneath and taking up the paint, changing the complexion of the game?

LAUREN BETTS: First off, I want to say Skinner -- Booker, sorry -- she's such an amazing player. I don't want yesterday to take over the fact that, like, she's had an amazing season. I've seen a lot of the stuff she's getting right now. She really doesn't deserve it all. I wish everybody would give her a little bit of grace because she's a human at the end of the day.

Yeah, for me, I think my entire goal this entire season is just to do my job and protect the rim. I think yesterday was just another example of what I consistently do every single game. The scout is usually the same for me: just protect the rim, don't let people get easy shots. If guards get beat, I'll be there to help them. I think that allows them to get out and protect the three-point line a little bit, to attack that.

Yeah, I don't know. I don't think it was anything special that I did yesterday. I think I was just staying true to what I usually do.

Q. During the first and second round you said you were happy to be done with classes.

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah.

Q. Let's take the focus back a little bit to the college in collegiate athletics. You said you loved your time at UCLA. There's basketball, there's your teammates. What was your favorite class at UCLA? What was your

toughest class?

LAUREN BETTS: Man, my toughest class, I'm not going to lie, Gabs and I were in the SOC 102 class. Shouldn't have been as hard as it was, but it was for us because we missed so many classes due to travel. It just makes it a lot more difficult than it has to be.

My favorite class? I think it was my education class that I took with Dr. Howard. He's an amazing professor. He's actually on this trip. He's been at most of our games this season. Him and I had like an independent study where I got to meet with him a few times on Zoom. Honestly we really didn't even talk about my paper, we just talked about life. He just continues to feed my confidence and just remind me of who I am.

The biggest piece of advice he always gives me, Lauren, you have to say no more often. You have to stop being so nice to people and give yourself a break. I feel like it was amazing advice. He helps me a lot mentally. He's a great guy, so...

Q. I want to know how many times you watched that block from the end of the game? Also obviously after the UConn-South Carolina game, there was a lot of off-court drama. Did Cori address any of it with you guys?

LAUREN BETTS: No. I saw what happened. Stuff happens. I don't know. I have nothing to do with that. Our team, we are not focused on that.

But sorry, what was your other question?

Q. The block.

LAUREN BETTS: Have I watched the block? I saw it a few times because my teammates were talking about it on the bus back to the hotel: Lauren, that was just amazing, it was like poetry.

To me it was just a block. I didn't really think of it that seriously. Yeah, I mean, I was just in the right place at the right time, so...

Q. How will your game change if South Carolina double-teams you tomorrow?

LAUREN BETTS: I've been double-teamed all season. I don't think it really changes anything for me. It's what I've worked on all season. Honestly since high school. I think for me, it's just staying patient and making the right reads and not letting their pressure dictate how I play.

Q. Kiki was talking about Jackie Joyner-Kersey talked to you after a game at Illinois. I wanted to ask you what you remember about that, what message she conveyed, what you think about your team, your legacy in the great pantheon of sports at UCLA?

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, no, that was really special to have someone like her come talk to our team. She's done a lot for UCLA. The way she pours into teams now I think is really special. I think for all the alum at UCLA, they just continue to just give us such good energy. I love that for us.

But I think, no, the message was really just, you know, give it everything you have, this is our last time, especially for the seniors, to do something like this, and to win a national championship. I think just don't leave this team and this program with anything left. You just want to give it all you have and just continue to fight and work together.

But yeah, I mean, she's done amazing things for UCLA. Just really thankful to have someone like her who continues to pour into us.

Q. What is your funniest Coach Cori story or Coach Cori-ism of all time?

LAUREN BETTS: Coach Cori-ism? Man, I think one of my favorite things that she says is, I think she said it yesterday, rings will collect dust and -- what's it called? -- banners will -- whatever. But she's like, the memories you create... Something like that. I don't know if I'm getting it wrong. She says it, like, all the time.

It's a beautiful message, but I hear it a lot (laughter). But it's beautiful. It comes from a good place. It's a really good quote.

Q. When all this is over, what will you remember most about playing for her?

LAUREN BETTS: I think the way she never has given up on me. Through everything that we've been through, how much we push each other, she pushes me every single day even on the days that I don't want to hear her, on the days where she knows she has to be a jerk sometimes.

She just knows what I'm capable of and she believes in me so much and is so confident in me days when I don't even believe in myself. I can't ask for a better person to coach me. When you have someone who has taken you from such a dark place and has gotten you to where I am today, I mean, she's such an amazing person in my life. I'm just always going to be very thankful for her.

Q. Back to the 2024 season, you had the double overtime loss in the Pac-12 tournament. That was a tough moment for everybody. Has it seemed like it's been a steady ascent since then?

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah.

Q. People talk about learning from losses. But you really did.

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, that's crazy. I don't even really remember that. That feels like so long ago.

Yeah, I think the biggest thing we learned from that game, I think our preparation has gotten amazing since then. We do special sitch every single practice. When we get into situations like that where we're down with how many seconds left, we know we're prepared and we're ready to compete and score because we've done it so many times in practice.

It shows even in yesterday's game. We were up 10, they start coming back. We're only up 3 at some point. We're very consistent. You can see it with our body language, the way we walk out on the court. We're just very steady for the entire game, so...

Q. You went viral, you did a dance for your Senior Day. As a former cheerleader myself, what did it take to learn the dance? Do you have a respect for the cheerleaders in this sport?

LAUREN BETTS: I do. Let me tell you, I had one rehearsal, I felt so sore after because we had done that little arched back part. I told them the next day, I was more sore from that than I have been in a pre-season practice. It was so exhausting.

Yeah, no, lots of credit because they have to be in really good shape to be able to push through an entire dance.

But yeah, no, that was really fun. Just really thankful I got to be a part of that. The dance team is so sweet. They love our team. They're always so supportive. For them to teach us a dance and be so patient with us, we think we're good, but we're definitely not as good as they are. That was just a really cool experience for the girls.

Q. You're coming off a pretty low-scoring contest against Texas. South Carolina is coming off a pretty low-scoring contest against UConn. When teams are playing such great defense, what do you look for from your team to generate good offense?

LAUREN BETTS: Our team, when we get stops, we like to

push in transition and play really fast. That's how we like to compete. Just making sure we're taking things away, coming out with a very aggressive mindset and making things really hard for them. I think that will push us in our offense.

I honestly think it's a mentality thing. I don't think there's anything basketball-wise we really need to change. It's just like, you know, the message that, like, you're just not going to stop us from scoring. I think that was the message yesterday at halftime when we went to the locker room. We were all talking about, like, we can't let them take away what we want to do. We have to be stronger. We have to push through it.

I think just the way we start out tomorrow will be really important.

Q. It comes down to all this, your last game at UCLA, the last game with all of you who played and struggle together. What are your thoughts going into this knowing it's your last game at UCLA? Even if you win, there's still no more. Is there a bit of nervousness mixed in with the excitement?

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I mean, I was talking to Pam yesterday after the game. We were both, like, honestly crying not just because we're heading into the national championship, but because it's our last time me wearing a UCLA jersey.

I think we always talk about, like, we'll win games tomorrow no matter how it goes, the journey that we've all had together and the things that we've been through has been so special, and the memories that we've created.

I love these girls so much. I'm going to fight for them till the death. I'm just so proud of the way we represented this school, this program, this community. These girls mean everything to me. This program has changed my life in the best way possible. I'm forever grateful for UCLA. It's the best decision I ever made, was coming here.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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