

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

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Amalie Arena

## South Carolina Gamecocks Coach Dawn Staley

### Te-Hina Paopao

### Joyce Edwards

#### Semifinal Postgame Media Conference



South Carolina - 74, Texas - 57

DAWN STALEY: Just tip our hats to Texas. We beat ourselves up in our league. We do a great job at positioning ourselves to represent the SEC on the biggest stage of our game. And it's unfortunate that someone had to take a loss, but I'm glad that the SEC is represented in the national championship game.

**Q. Joyce, after the Elite Eight game, Dawn said she needs you to step up, she's going to need you to play big if you guys want to win a national championship. Describe what it was like to kind of find yourself in this game and put on the performance that you did?**

JOYCE EDWARDS: It's comforting. I'm definitely having a struggle in the tournament. But it's comforting just knowing that I was going to bounce back and influence a win. I'm happy it was today. And I did just what the game gave me.

**Q. Was there anything you did different preparing for this game than perhaps you did against the last three games?**

JOYCE EDWARDS: I feel I was more definitive. More open minded. Like I said, giving what the game gave me, not overthinking, not second-guessing, just going.

**Q. Slow start, but it looked like business as usual. You just got back into the game. How important was it to not panic right away?**

JOYCE EDWARDS: We've been in those situations before, slow starts. We knew how to bounce back. We're

a resilient team. Especially in the tournament, we had a lot of close games. It wasn't a pressure to do anything out of the ordinary. We just knew we just had to keep going.

TE-HINA PAOPAO: It's something that we shouldn't be used to but we are used to it. And we catch ourselves down in the first few minutes of the game but we know we're going to get back. We played great defense. They were just making better shots and tough shots, which is what we want them to do.

**Q. Te-Hina, this is for you because in that first quarter you had a really good on-ball, defensive moment towards that steal, towards that first quarter. It kind of gave you a spark a little bit. Defensively what were you seeing that you feel like could really help the team and propel them?**

TE-HINA PAOPAO: I knew from my defense from the Indiana game I had to keep playing defense like that. So I knew that this was a big game and I knew that energy -- energy starts from defense, and that's what I wanted my team to do.

When you have Breezy playing defense like that, you want to play defense for her and the team and you want to play great and solid defense and get the train going.

And I'm still going to play great defense. We've got one more left. We're just really excited to get going.

**Q. Joyce, for you, the struggles early in the tournament, I'm curious how you kept yourself level headed to know that a moment like this was coming up for you. And, Te-Hina, to see Joyce make such a big impact like that, knowing how young she is, knowing she didn't get down on herself early in the tournament, what did that say about her as well?**

JOYCE EDWARDS: Well, I was trying not to get too low with the lows and too high with the highs. Just went out there and playing. You're going to have slumps. It's part of growth. It's part of the process.

My coaches comforted me. My teammates comforted me.



My family comforted me. The people in my inner circle made sure I kept my mindset at an even-keeled level. So just depending on them.

TE-HINA PAOPAO: She's a great player. Her ceiling is very high. She came through with us today. You've got to go through that process to really look at yourself and see if you really want to play this game of basketball. She's done a great job getting through that.

And we've helped her be, like, instilling confidence in her and knowing that we need her and we trust her. And she's done a great job with that and she came at the right time.

**Q. Te-Hina, yesterday Joyce was telling me that she doesn't really feel pressure. Is that something you've seen from her? And how do you see her navigate all the expectations and stuff?**

TE-HINA PAOPAO: I mean, yeah, she's like the crash out of our team, but she's super chill. She'll be on with her Beats on. She'll just be listening to music, watching shows. She's just really chill.

There's something about her that her confidence and her aura, it's growing and it's something nice to see. We knew she was going to have a big-time game today because she's going to bounce right back. And her journey and her process is going to be really great to see. I'm just super proud of her for keeping going and knowing that we need her.

**Q. Joyce, that third quarter for the team was seemingly definitive. I'm wondering, on this team, where there's no clear pecking order of who is supposed to take charge, how do you go about figuring that out?**

JOYCE EDWARDS: It's great. You just play basketball. That's all there is to it. You don't have to feel like you have to force the ball to somebody or you don't have to feel like somebody has to score first to win. It's hard for other teams especially because they have to scout for all of us. And I know that's a little struggle. It's just a great thing.

**Q. You mentioned this shouldn't be normal but it is. Its normal here in a way -- it's been very few programs in the history of the sport. How much does it feel like vindication for you to make this decision to come back, to be part of this in this moment?**

TE-HINA PAOPAO: I mean, this is why I came back. The goal was to go back-to-back. Obviously we have one more to go. We're just really excited to get going on Sunday. I don't know, we've just got one more, and I'm super excited.

I know we're going to be really prepared and ready and that it's going to be a 40-minute battle, no matter who wins.

**Q. Te-Hina, how important was it getting Madison in foul trouble early? And what type of impact did you feel that had on the game?**

TE-HINA PAOPAO: It was a great impact. I mean, every time she got a foul, we would throw up a number, this is how many fouls she's got. When you have a great player like that you've just got to keep going at her because you know you've got to get them in foul trouble, which changes the whole aspect of the game.

We took advantage of that. I'm just super proud of on your team for adjusting and being able to get the ball to whoever was rocking at the time. We're a team. I'm just super proud of them in that it was a really big get for us.

**Q. The game against Maryland and Duke was pretty close, but this one, you guys kind of look at that first half and figure out a way to pull ahead. What was going through your mind at that moment when Texas was up? What kind of came to your mind to be able to execute?**

JOYCE EDWARDS: Like we said, we're resilient. We've been through battles, like you said, throughout the tournament with Duke and Maryland and even Indiana.

We just know how it's going to be. We know how competitive the tournament is going to be. And we know we have to be resilient. We can't get too low on ourselves when we're down and we can't get too high when we have a big lead. We just have to keep going, and that's it.

TE-HINA PAOPAO: Basketball is a game of runs. They went on their run. We went on our run and we came up with the win. So I'm proud of our run.

**Q. Obviously a lot of talk about your team is how experienced you are in March. Someone that doesn't have the experience of last year is Maryam Dauda. She played huge minutes tonight, hit the corner 3 at the end of the game. As a teammate I've seen her filming in the locker room. Seems like she's really soaking in this experience. What was it like seeing her play valuable minutes today and how well did she do, in your opinion?**

TE-HINA PAOPAO: I mean, she did great. I'm super proud of her. She's trusted her processed, her journey and played great minutes today. She did a really good job on the post players today in her defense and offense and just being able to do what she does at such a high level and on

a big platform.

I'm just super proud of her. And she's got to keep that confidence going. It's something new to her. But it's something she's doing great with. She just did a really great job today. She's the MVP of the game today.

JOYCE EDWARDS: Yeah, we love Maryam. We're super proud of her. She could have gave up at the beginning of the season, but whenever Coach called her name she was ready.

And you've seen it in spurts the whole season. We knew we could depend on her when we needed to. We're super proud. She's resilient. She works hard. And, again, it's not an if, it's a when.

**Q. Breezy came through big today. Usually we see her playing hard defense especially when it's with Madison Booker but did it on both ends of the floor and had a little fun doing it. Talk about Breezy and how much fun she had, how well her shots went in. And how do you guys balance having fun but also getting the job done?**

TE-HINA PAOPAO: I mean, she's called Big Shot Breezy for a reason. She came through big for us. She holds our defense down. I'm just super proud of her and her journey here.

She's just done a great job. To see her out there having fun like that, it just gets everyone going and everyone's confidence going as well. For her to do that on such a big stage, I'm super proud of her. And she's got to keep it going for one more game. It's just a great sight to see.

JOYCE EDWARDS: Breezy is a great player. You've seen her defense in previous games and her offense showed up today. Hoping she continues with that confidence. She's a great player.

**Q. Plies the rapper lives here. You're his favorite women's college basketball team. You're in Tampa right now. Was the pressure on to do it big for Plies?**

JOYCE EDWARDS: No. We did it for ourselves. We did it for the team. Not necessarily for anybody else. But, I mean, we're obviously happy with the support.

TE-HINA PAOPAO: Yeah, what she said.

**Q. Is this second look we're getting as a result of a Gatorade bath in the locker room?**

DAWN STALEY: No, it's getting ready to watch the next

game.

**Q. What impact have you seen your program's success have on South Carolina's athletic department as a whole?**

DAWN STALEY: I think the success of our program has impact on our athletics department, our university, enrollment -- I think the city of Columbia and the state of South Carolina.

We lead the nation in attendance. We've led it for the past 10 years. Because of that, we are entertaining people coming to watch us play when they come in and spend their money. And we bring revenue into the places that we play.

And I think it's a beautiful thing. I do think it can occur in a lot more places. You just have to have buy-in, from our president, to our AD, to everyone.

We have a great community. We really lean on each other. Coach Beamer's always -- I don't know how he finds the time -- but he's at every sports game. It's a community of people that allow us to impact far more than just the young people that are in our locker room. It's a far reach.

And I'm glad I represent the University of South Carolina athletics department, the state of South Carolina, the city of Columbia, because they give so much more to our program.

And the experience that our players are getting for the past, I don't know -- I mean since I've been at South Carolina; this is my 17th year -- has been awesome. I want to bottle it up and give it to other women's basketball programs because you're valued a little bit different when you're able to produce a little revenue.

**Q. At halftime, whatever adjustments you made led to three turnovers total from your team in the second half, led to holding Madison Booker without a field goal after the 7:10 mark of the third quarter. Take me through what that conversation was like and what adjustments you felt were most effective.**

DAWN STALEY: You bring things to the attention of our players. The turnovers -- they didn't hurt us as far as they didn't score a whole lot of points off of our turnovers.

It's just momentum killers. It just creates -- it doesn't allow you to have fluidity from an offensive standpoint. So it's a lot of disruption.

And our defense is our defense. Madison Booker is a



tremendous player. A lot of what we've done, when we've had to scheme for her, is for her. She's a big part of -- she carries a heavy load of their scoring.

And then the next thing was their bigs. We didn't want them to make paint points. We made it difficult for them. We just tried to disrupt the flow of their shot, especially when they caught it deep.

And then over a 40-minute period, with our depth, I think we just wear teams down.

**Q. Coach, Edwards gives you 13 points, 11 rebounds and three blocks off the bench. She also gives you six assists and six drawn fouls. How important was it to get that kind of complete game coming from off the bench?**

DAWN STALEY: I mean, it's incredibly important, right? Because if you look at the games in which we had tight games the past three to four games, three games prior to this game, I mean they're one-, two-possession games.

A lot had to do with the amount of production -- and I don't want to put that much pressure on her, but that's what she's been doing all season long. When she doesn't get her average, when she doesn't fly around out there, we feel it. We feel it.

So I'm happy for Joyce because I know as a young person, you're struggling. The very thing that you love to do. And you work at -- like, she really works at it. She watches film. She's obsessively working out. So you want people like that to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

But there's also growth. It was hard. I'm like embrace it. Try to get as much information as possible while you're young as a freshman in how people are guarding you. And start familiarizing yourself with how they're guarding you because you'll see it at different times against different opponents and you'll know how to navigate.

I thought she took her time. She didn't seem pressed. She uses her athleticism, her strength and her ability to direct line drive. Her game was very lean today, and we love to see that.

**Q. Following up on that, there was a play in the third quarter Joyce grabbed the rebound, dribbled through traffic took it to the basket. Just looked like she was very, very confident. I'm wondering, did you have to have discussions with her? She was saying she knew she was going to go through stretches, or was there something you or any of the assistants said to her to kind of get her over this hump?**

DAWN STALEY: I mean, we're always communicating with our players, especially the ones that are -- you can see that they're struggling. I mean, there's that talk where you just gotta work your way through it. What are you thinking about? It's all those questions you ask them just to get them to go a little bit deeper because you're holding on to it. And you're like I want to perform so well that it works against you.

So you get them to talk and release everything that's holding them down, and it frees them up.

So we've had a number of conversations. I'm sure everybody, the assistant coaches. I did tell her she needs to probably block out some of the voices.

We all want the same thing. We all want her to get out of it and play well, but when you're going through it, you're trying to figure out whose voice matters the most. And for her, everybody matters. Like every single person matters. But it's five different conversations.

So I told her you've got to find who that person is for you, whether it's -- her parents are always going to be there. Someone on our coaching staff you can really go to and just kind of decompress and put everything you need to put there.

I mean, if it's me, it's me. If it's one of our assistant coaches, it's great. But certainly we know she's going to go through some more, but she'll have this experience to kind of hopefully shorten that amount of time.

**Q. You said that Breezy is in your all-time defensive team. She had a tremendous game on both ends of the floor. What is it like to see her doing that and helping you guys advanced to a national championship once again?**

DAWN STALEY: I mean, Breezy doesn't get a whole lot of credit for the contributions she's given our program over her four years. We haven't told her to score but we know she can score. She scored in high school.

You've got a pecking order that you go through. And today was a day in which she felt like -- she just felt good. Breezy has been feeling good probably over the last couple of weeks because she knows it's coming to an end.

Sunday will be the end of her college career. Now that she knows that, she just wants to win. And her contributions will be just contributing to winning. And today she did it on both sides of the basketball.



**Q. You're at the stage where you've never lost a title game before. What impact does that have? Is that something you have to show? Do you use it when you're talking up gassing up your players' confidence? And is that something you say, you're comfortable here; you know exactly what to do here. Which way does that tilt, I guess?**

DAWN STALEY: I don't even bring it up. It's just singularly focused on winning a game. Nothing that happened prior to here is going to help us on Sunday -- nothing. If it's UConn, it's not going to help us. If it's UCLA, not going to help us.

I think playing in the game and seeing how the game is being played out, it's the only thing that's going to help us.

Saying that we're undefeated in national championship games, it's not -- I wish it helped, I wish it would -- spot us 10 points because we're undefeated. I feel really good about that. (Chuckles).

**Q. You've clearly had the upper hand against Texas this year and for a while. What in your mind separates your program from Texas?**

DAWN STALEY: We score more points than they do. I mean, we're tough. Both of our defenses are tough. We make it really hard for us to just run our sets. We make it hard for them to run their sets. I think it comes down to -- I think depth really plays a part in our success.

I can't go back to all the times that we've played them, but I'm pretty sure that depth played a part today. And depth played a part in the games that we played this season. So it's probably that.

And I think we do a really good job on Booker just because we've got bodies to throw at her. We've got a defender in Breezy that really sets the example for some of the younger players that come in and play, like Tessa Johnson. Breezy is the example.

They're just following her lead. And hopefully she's leaving a legacy of how we need to operate because Booker is not going anywhere. We're going to see her for two more years. Like two more years we'll see her.

**Q. You guys were down 12-4 and you inserted Tessa and MiLaysia in there and it got you guys going. About that depth, how big a luxury is that, because they played lights out when you brought them in?**

DAWN STALEY: I mean, it's what we've counted on them all season long -- ever since last year. Our depth has been

a part of the success of our program. I mean, they could start, both of them. Joyce can start for any program.

They chose to come to us because, one, you're going to learn how to play, like really going to learn how to play. Two, you're going to play a competitive schedule. Three, you're going to play in front of the best fans in the country at an almost capacity clip.

They want to be pros. We produce pros. And I like to tell them that anybody on our team currently probably won't start for a WNBA team. I don't think so.

So to come off the bench, to have franchises see you play and what would be your natural position for them, I think it's a great thing.

So, I mean, just proud of our team. Proud of our depth. Proud players that chose to come here, and they really get the experience being at a Final Four and now the national championship.

**Q. Did you expect to play Texas four times this season? Do you think that there might be a chance that this is the next great women's basketball rivalry?**

DAWN STALEY: I really didn't anticipate playing Texas four times. But once I saw the bracket, I kind of knew it was a high possibility that it would happen.

And, I mean, I'm actually just proud to play them a fourth time because that means we're both here. We both represent our conference well. We did a great job within our conference and being co-regular season champs. So it's only fitting that the two best teams represent the best conference in the country in the Final Four.

**Q. Paopao led all scorers with 14 points. Could you talk a little bit about her leadership?**

DAWN STALEY: Pao, we've been waiting for that ball to go in at an efficient clip from Pao. Pao is just a steady leader that can do multiple things.

Obviously she can score the ball. But what most impresses me, along with her leadership skills and her ability to calm us, is her defense. Her defense has come a long way. Like, she knows it's super important for her to play on that side of the ball, especially where she's going to be playing for the next few years which is the WNBA.

Pao chose to come to South Carolina for these moments, but also she knew that defense -- there was a hole in her defensive game and she knew we were going to force her to play and force her to play because we know you're not

going to play at the next level without playing on that side of the ball.

**Q. I think it was at the end of that first quarter, the last bucket you guys had, that Joyce took Kyla off the dribble, she looked at you and you looked at her, like, go. What do you remember at that moment? This whole tournament seemed like the whole coaching staff really pushed her and tried to give her some support. I'm curious what you've seen from her over the whole season that you knew she would be ready and be able to respond at this moment?**

DAWN STALEY: One, she was due. Two, I mean Joyce is really so cerebral. And that works against her too because she watches film so much that when our opponent isn't where she thinks they're supposed to be, it kind of throws her off a little bit. Like, that's not what I studied.

She's a very high intelligent individual. She's in our honors college. And not very many athletes are in the honors college because we have the number one honors college in the country as well.

So it is that. She's got to be able to play within the lines but not absolute. Like, academics is absolute in her space. So she thinks from that perspective and she just wanted the cue to take off because she felt like she can actually -- it's a good match-up for her to take her man off the dribble.

**Q. Your team talked a lot this week about understanding they hadn't played their best brand of basketball just yet, and kind of this sense of urgency of wanting to put a really dominant performance on in the Final Four. In that first quarter, when Texas takes that lead, did you feel there was a sense of anxiousness with your team? And in that timeout, what was your message to them to kind of settle them into the game?**

DAWN STALEY: In those situations, like, we found ourselves in that situation against Iowa last year in the national championship where we were down 10 or 11 to nothing. And as a coach, you're just evaluating what's happening out there. Are we getting good looks? Are we defending at a really high clip and they're making good shots? Which happened.

It happened just like Caitlin Clark was hitting shots. Her natural shots that we say those are shots, okay, that's what she's going to take. Madison Booker was doing a great job coming off screens and elevating and making shots. She was in a rhythm.

Didn't like that part of it, but we were there. It wasn't like she was getting wide-open looks and we basically said that's their run so let's go on our run. Let's tighten up defensively. Let's tighten up rebounding the basketball.

I thought we did a great job rebounding the ball. And then we turned the ball over a lot in the first -- I think we had like nine, had 10 for the half, and then we only ended up turning it over three times the rest of the way, which allows us to rebound better. It allows us to do a lot more things actually keep them on offense a little bit longer.

And I knew that over the course -- we talked about over the course of 1:35, maybe Booker's pretty J isn't as fluid and maybe her legs aren't giving what they need to give for her to get the lift on her shot.

It was just that. It was just part of being patient and letting the game come to us.

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