

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Southern California vs South Carolina

Monday, March 23, 2026  
Columbia, South Carolina, USA  
Colonial Life Arena

## South Carolina Gamecocks

**Dawn Staley**

**Raven Johnson**

**Agot Makeer**

Media Conference

South Carolina - 101, USC - 61

DAWN STALEY: This is the last home game in the Arena, so super proud of just the atmosphere and we're happy Raven has led our team to another Sweet 16.

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

**Q. What was working so well, particularly in the first quarter, and what did you see in transition?**

**Obviously, we talked about your defense yesterday, but it felt like you were especially connected sort of turning that into offense from the jump.**

AGOT MAKEER: Yeah, I saw an open floor. I feel like our team, they run pretty hard, our bigs, and they deserve to get the ball. So just seeing them run in transition, I knew I had to give it to them.

RAVEN JOHNSON: I think we executed the Xs and Os, especially with defense and knowing personnel, and we got a lot of steals. Everybody was in the gap and it led to transition points and, yeah, I think she got a big steal. It was, like, full court and she laid the ball up. That was big momentum changer. So, yeah.

**Q. Both of you did a really strong lockdown job on Jazzy tonight when you had her. Was that part of the game plan, just slow her down, especially from what she did in the first round?**

RAVEN JOHNSON: Yeah, she's a phenomenal player and



what she's doing as a freshman is pretty good, but I think, you know, our coaches had a good game plan and we executed that.

AGOT MAKEER: Yeah, I think the game plan on every team is to slow down their best player, especially me. I was motivated going in. She's my class, so just getting to play against her again was fun.

**Q. Raven, what were the emotions as you took the last walk around the arena after the game?**

RAVEN JOHNSON: You want the truth?

DAWN STALEY: Oh, my God (laughing).

RAVEN JOHNSON: It hasn't hit me yet because we're not done yet. Yeah.

**Q. There were 34 bench points, there were six players in double-digit points, including yourself. I know the starting lineup gets such a high praise, but what can you tell us about a collective program and the bench performing tonight?**

AGOT MAKEER: Yeah, I think in practice, we play against -- we play in our groups, bench. Bench will be doing it. We play against each other. So it's just fun because we've been connecting in practice and it's been really good. So to see it connect on the floor is really fun, especially going forward.

**Q. Something that Coach Staley often says is she doesn't really treat freshmen like freshmen. Do you think that philosophy and being challenged from sort of day one and treated like an upper classman has prepared you to perform like you did the last two games in your first March Madness?**

AGOT MAKEER: Yeah, I think I came here to be challenged. I know there were other options, but I wanted to be coached by the best. It's hard. Like, I struggled at times, but I feel like now I'm rising up and it's only going to make me better.



**Q. Did you know when you got that steal and layup that it was for your thousandth point?**

RAVEN JOHNSON: No. Everybody keeps saying a thousand this, that, and a third. I'm not really thinking of that. I'm just thinking about dancing to the nets tomorrow. I'm worried about winning a National Championship. That's the main goal, so, yeah, whatever comes with it, comes with it.

**Q. You came here because of the program that this is and you want games like this and to advance in the NCAA tournament, but when you're going through it, do you allow yourself to say, Wow, I'm in the Sweet 16 in my freshman year? And, yeah, there's more to do, but this is pretty special.**

AGOT MAKEER: It is really special and I think it's going to be exciting going forward. I'm taking it in right now and I'm excited to go forward.

**Q. Raven, can we expect an Aflac team-up NIL?**

RAVEN JOHNSON: With the duck? The duck don't even speak English, right? I don't know.

DAWN STALEY: He says "Aflac."

RAVEN JOHNSON: Yeah, I know, but that's it. That's all I know.

**Q. (No microphone.)**

RAVEN JOHNSON: Oh, yeah. Oh, are we teaming up? Oh, yeah, sure. If she's on my -- if she's in it, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse the student-athletes and take questions for Coach.

**Q. I don't mean to sound like a broken record continuing asking about Agot's defense, but what did you see from her and how would you rate what she's given you the last two games?**

DAWN STALEY: I think Agot's been building towards playing the way she's been playing. Like, she's been playing very consistently. I do think that when she knows she's going to play, she practices better, she prepares better, she focuses, better. And that's probably just, you know, a young thing.

But I think she's probably the most talented guard that we have on our roster, like, just both sides of the ball. I've said that a number of times. She just needs to get playing experience under her belt. As you can see, the more she

plays, the more you can see what she can do out there on both side of the floor, and I think it's just a tip of the iceberg. I think she's got more in her tank and she's got more to give and more to grow. Once she's able to do that, you'll see just a really incredibly gifted player.

**Q. I don't know if you know, but with tonight's attendance, it's the 12th season, 12-th consecutive season with you guys leading women's basketball in attendance. Can you speak to the fan culture here at South Carolina.**

DAWN STALEY: I mean, the fans are like no other. I think they have created not a movement, but a lifestyle. It's a lifestyle for people to set their schedules to come to our game. They budget to come to our games, to buy season tickets, to go on the road, to support us. You can do some marketing ploys, you can do some of that, but what's happened here is pretty magical. I think it was done by word of mouth. It was done by people enjoying themselves and then buying more and more season tickets so other people can experience it, and then from that, it really just has grown.

Now it's just -- culturally it's what we do here. It's a beautiful thing. It really is. It is hard to duplicate, but certainly the way you do it is you give access. We give our fans access to us whether it's open practices, whether it's -- I think we did a -- the opening season. It wasn't Midnight Madness. I mean, when we do things like that and give students and the community access, they want more and more and more. And they come in numbers. So it is quite an honor to play before them each and every game.

**Q. Big day for Virginia women's basketball. First Sweet 16 since 2000 and obviously the news with Tammi at Florida. How meaningful is it that starting next season you'll be able to look across and be coaching against her?**

DAWN STALEY: It's pretty cool. I think Tammi's built for high-level basketball, and she's very passionate about the game. That's all I've known her to be in all the years that I've known her. I think she will be a really good fit for Florida. I think they have to get ready for her, though, because she's going to need to be supported. She's going to be -- she's going to speak out on being supported. But I do think it will be a changing of the guard that will elevate Florida women's basketball in a great way.

**Q. Your players seem locked in right from the beginning of this one, and this was not, you know, a 16-seeded team. This is a talented team that knows how to play and advance in the NCAAs. I mean, you got to be -- how driven are they right now to achieve**

## **the things that you put on the table?**

DAWN STALEY: I think we're starting to connect. I do think the excitement of playing in the NCAA tournament has lifted them to play connected basketball, to know that the stakes are high at this point. It takes a win to advance. I think that it's bringing out the ultra competitiveness in them. But we know we also have a really good team ahead of us in Oklahoma, someone that beat us this year, and that we are going to be challenged. So if we are so blessed enough to make it to the Elite 8, we know we beat an incredible, hungry basketball team.

### **Q. Did you peek ahead at all to see that Virginia won today and you could match up?**

DAWN STALEY: I did. I watched 'em. Yeah, there's a possibility. I'm very happy for Virginia. I've been in really close contact with Coach Mox throughout her tenure, and I'm really happy that they made it to the Sweet 16 and they're probably a little bit hungry for more. I don't put anything past them continuing to win.

### **Q. On the note of that Sweet 16 matchup versus OU, I think that obviously a crucial matchup between that will be Madina versus Raegan Beers. What did you see in the first matchup and what can you tell us about prepping for the second time?**

DAWN STALEY: I mean, I thought they were on, I think, a three-game losing streak, and they wanted to win. I mean, it was imperative that they win the game that we played them, just for morale, just for making a run in our league. I thought they wanted it more, and they played that way. I thought we played wanting it for about a two-minute stretch to get it tied up, and then we really had a chance to win it in regulation, but didn't come up with a good look. We turned the basketball over.

So it was just a battle of wills and their will was much stronger than ours in that particular game.

### **Q. At the end I saw Maryam with some tears in her eye. It was also her last game. Can you speak to what she's meant to this program? And she had nine points and two "and ones" tonight?**

DAWN STALEY: Maryam has been someone that has been a giver. She's sacrificed her career for the betterment of our team, and she does it in such a classy way. She obviously wants to play and she feels like she's good enough to play. And we feel like that too. I think that because of who we have on our team, it didn't allow her to play as much as we anticipated her playing. And she got off to a really slow start last year. I mean, she's actually

doing what she did for us last year. So she got just more confident at the end of the season, and now we don't second-guess to put her in the basketball game.

But she's helped with recruiting. She's helped just being a great teammate. She's helped with -- she's just very, very positive. Even though, you know, things aren't probably perfect in her world of basketball in wanting to play, but we don't feel that. We only feel what she positively impacts our basketball team.

### **Q. The SEC has been a monster conference all year long and it's that way again. I think there's six teams who advanced to the Sweet 16. With a couple of rematches, I think Texas and Kentucky are going to play, along with you guys and Oklahoma, I mean, what does that say about this conference and the amount of respect and ability that it has when it comes to these big moments like the NCAA tournament?**

DAWN STALEY: Yeah, it's indicative of the quality teams. Alabama lost by two, I believe. So we're right there almost having seven Sweet 16 participants. I mean, our league prepares us for this level of play. Like, there isn't an opponent out there that we don't feel like we're prepared for because of what we have been challenged with in the regular season and in the SEC tournament.

So it's a testament to our league and a testament to the great coaching and the great talent that we're able to rise to that challenge and win basketball games and advance to the Sweet 16.

### **Q. There's been a lot of talk from fans in around the internet as to who the really USC is, and even the game at Crypto earlier this season was billed as the real USC, so is that something that you guys wear as a badge of honor? Is that even on your guys' mind?**

DAWN STALEY: I think that's probably more of a fan thing and something to discuss on social media. Obviously, we want to play the game because they're a top-10 program in the country and they got some pretty talented players. And then they will be super talented next year, so I'm sure -- actually, I'm not even going to go there right now. I'm just going to enjoy actually advancing to the Sweet 16 because who they're bringing to the table next year should be a truly quality opponent in November.

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