

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 3 Semifinal - Kentucky vs Texas

Friday, March 27, 2026

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Texas Longhorns
Coach Vic Schaefer

Rori Harmon

Madison Booker

Jordan Lee

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Texas Head Coach Vic Schaefer. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach.

VIC SCHAEFER: Good morning, everybody. Appreciate y'all being here. We're certainly excited to be here. My team is really special. I've really had a great year.

To replace three starters from our Final Four team a year ago and for them to play the way they've played, responded this year during just a little bit of tough times, they've played really well most of the year. From even back in November with the schedule that we had to trying to navigate the SEC schedule early and then rebounding, and they have just played really, really well here the last month.

I couldn't be more proud of a group of young ladies. They are tough. They have played the game of right way. They've prepared every day. It's been a real joy for me to see them and to see them grow and mature and learn to be accountable a little bit.

Again, for me in coaching it's more than just the Xs and Os. I'm really proud of this group because I've seen their growth. I've seen their wanting to be accountable and, man, they've got an incredible competitive spirit.

We know we've got a tough task at hand. Two years in a row now we've had to play an SEC team in the Sweet 16, one of our fellow teams from our league. Certainly Kentucky has our attention. A lot of respect for Coach



Brooks' team and their staff. We're going to have to play really well tomorrow against them.

We've had a really good week I think for the most part. Again, I couldn't be more proud of a team. I love this group. They're a lot of fun to be around, and they've been really a lot of fun to coach.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. Kenny Brooks was just in here talking about how much you having your daughters on staff has inspired him and changed the way he involves family in his program. What does it mean to have that be part of your legacy and to see others, you know -- what have your conversations with Kenny been like about that?

VIC SCHAEFER: Kenny and I have had some really unique and special conversations regarding family. He and I have both been through some really challenging and life-altering situations. He with his wife battling cancer and with me almost losing my son, who is the twin brother of Blair, who is on my staff.

I think when you go through those kinds of things, it changes you, and it changes perspective sometimes. It doesn't mean that he and I aren't any more passionate and intense with trying to do the job we have.

But you know, for me, I can tell you, when I've had a tough day or not, might get my rear end beat one night, it just takes one phone call to my son to hear his voice on the other end of a phone call and it grounds me really quick.

So, you know, for he and I -- again, it has been so special. First, to have Blair play for me. A little bit 5'5", 5'6", ends up being on the all-defense team in the SEC. There's only five of them. She took 90 charges in her career. That means she probably got trucked about 200 times.

You know, just tough as nails. Her and Sydney Carter both on my staff played for me, and both of them, probably two of the toughest kids I've ever coached. It is special.

Again, to see Blair's growth as a player and helping take us



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to back-to-back national championship games her junior and senior year to now having her on staff, she's earned her way in both situations.

So for me I'm so fortunate because I got all my family in Austin. I get to see my son, my daughter, my wife. I can see them every day if I wanted to, and we still try to have family dinners just like when they were in college.

It is a really unique. I count it as a blessing. The good Lord, he has blessed me in so many different ways, and to be able to coach with Blair, first coach her and now coach with her, what a blessing the good Lord has given me and our team, because she's really good at what she does.

I think that's the thing. She's thorough, and sometimes I look at her, and I have to ask, man, she's with me until 2:00 in the morning at the SEC Tournament when we're fixing to play I think Ole Miss, because that was her scout. I'm thinking, man, where does this kid get it? Then I realize who she gets it from.

So it's a pretty special thing.

Q. Two-part question. What, if anything, can you take from your first meeting with Kentucky that's helped you prep for this one? Then, second part, just personal preference. I know that there are up sides and down sides to it, but just your personal preference and personal thoughts on playing conference opponents when the stakes are so much higher here come tournament time?

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, it's seven weeks ago when we played them, so I think they're a way different team. They're playing way better. I think we're different. You know, we're playing pretty well, too.

Certainly I've looked at that film a couple of different times, but you know, when you come from the Southeastern Conference and you have ten teams in the tournament, it's just inevitable. You got Oklahoma and South Carolina playing each other.

It's really difficult to dodge it, to be quite honest. It happens, and again, we beat each other up for -- we've played 19 SEC games this year, 16 in the regular season, 3 in the tournament. This will be number 20.

I would like to beat my head in against somebody else than against somebody in my own league, but it's the draw of the tournament.

Again, I think that speaks to our league and how good our league is, and you're going to have this happen. It might

happen more than once. You know, last year it happened twice in the NCAA Tournament. It's just part of it. Again, it's inevitable.

Q. How special has it been to watch Sarah Graves these past four years and then to get to put her in in the first two round games?

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, you know, in coaching you have a lot of unique and special situations that occurred throughout your career when you have coached 41 years like I have. I've been a part of some unique and special situations. Sarah is certainly one of those. Just an incredible kid.

Again, earned her way. Came as a walk-on. Earned her way on as a scholarship athlete. What she brings to the table, to our locker room, to our players, to our staff, you can't put a value on. She's such a special, special young lady.

I'm trying to get her another year. I put her in for one minute, one minute, in the last game of the year I think her first year with me just to get my seniors out to honor them on the road, so I'm trying like heck to get that one year back for one minute.

So if that doesn't happen, I need everybody in here to raise hell. What an injustice that would be, huh? One minute, and that's going to cost you a year. It's not like she's somebody playing 20 minutes a game or 30 minutes a game.

Her value, what she brings to the table, what it would allow her to do with her master's degree, I don't think people realize. That kid sits on a board with professional basketball players, ownership of the Spurs. It's a who's who in that room, and Sarah Graves is in that room on that board just like the rest of them.

That's how she's looked upon, so it's really special.

She's just a special kid. I'm happy for her. At the same time I'm a little selfish. I sure hope I get her one more year.

Q. Vic, the Naismith Defensive Player of the Year was announced this week, and there are no SEC players on the list. I'm wondering if that surprised you? Secondly, what are your thoughts about Kentucky's Clara Strack and what she presents on the defensive end?

VIC SCHAEFER: Yeah, Strack is a great player. She presents a lot of problems. You have to really -- we have to really be cognizant of her and Key and then their

shooters. The point guards are playing so well. They have a laundry list of issues for me.

But you know, Strack has just continued I think to develop, get better and better. Kenny has done a great job with her. You know, from a match-up perspective, it's a real challenge. She's so long, like you better put a butt on her because she's a great rebounder. She has that nose for where the ball is coming off from.

I've watched plenty of film on her, so we're going to have to really do a great job. But at the same time, it's not like you can bring help to double her, because they got a couple of kids out there that can make threes like in their sleep.

It's a team that presents a lot of problems. Again, from seven weeks ago to today, they're just a way different team. So we're going to have to play really, really well. But she is a special talent, no question. She certainly has our attention.

As far as the Defensive Player of the Year award, I have to be careful, Danny. I don't want to take anything away from anybody else on the list. All I'll say is we play in the Southeastern Conference, and it is full of future WNBA players. I'll take our league against any other league with how many players are in that league, how many future players are in that -- going to be in that league, and that's who we have to guard every night.

We'll just leave it at that.

It's the same in coaching. When I go and I have to coach in this league like every night I'm going against a future Hall of Famer in some Hall of Fame. It's just that way. Every coach is really good. Every player, every team has a difference player that commands your respect and your attention. Then a lot of nights some teams have two and three.

You know, I think our league has plenty of great defensive players. I have to deal with them night in and night out. You know, again, I'm not on those committees. I don't make those decisions, but I think when you start having these national awards, you got to get past some of the things that I think they're looking at. You have to look at who these teams are going against night in and night out. I think that's a fair way to do it.

I think for two months of the year we're going -- in January and February we're going against the best of the best. It's not like we're just playing five or six teams in nonconference. We played five or six in nonconference and played 19 in the SEC, right?

You know, that's what we deal with and our players deal with in this league. Again, congratulations to those kids that are on that list. Again, I think we have plenty of players in our league that certainly warrant consideration, and I'm sure they were.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time today. We have the Texas Longhorns, student-athletes, Rori Harmon, Madison Booker, and Jordan Lee. Questions for our student-athletes.

Q. Rori, this match-up features two finalists for the national point guard of the year. If you could just speak to what you see from Tonie Morgan and what's interesting about her game in this rematch.

RORI HARMON: Yeah, she's a great point guard. Matched up with her already one time, but she has a lot of patience, and I think that's what you need to have to be a great point guard, and I think she's a great point guard, but she facilitates the ball really well. We gets downhill. She gets her teammates involved.

Yeah, she's a great point guard, and I can't wait for the match-up.

Q. Rori, I was just going to ask, what was your takeaway the first time you played Kentucky, and how much do you think what you saw from them and how you guys look at that time will help you this time around against them?

RORI HARMON: Great question. I remember we had them up for a little bit. They started making their way back, as a great team does, but looking back, I think Madison didn't get too many shots. It was that type of game where she just didn't get enough shots up. I think we need to work a little bit harder as a team for that to happen.

Obviously our defense was really well. That was in February, am I right? Early February? Now we're in late March, and so both teams obviously have improved their game really well. Film has looked different because we're looking at film from their most recent games versus, like, when we played them in February; people are playing better and doing better as well as we are.

I think it just comes down to who executes the best and who gets the most rebounds.

Q. Rori, I know you've worked really closely with Sydney Carter. What does it mean for you to work with her, how she's elevated her game, to be with someone who won a title as a player?

RORI HARMON: Yeah, Sydney is amazing. She has had so much support for me throughout my career here. I've really focused on our relationship. Getting that close to someone who is like Sydney Carter who all she cares about is other people. She's very selfless. She works out with me. We do a lot of workouts together. She examines my film with me together. My workouts are geared to what I do on the court and what I can do better.

But she's always been in my corner. It's not just basketball. She's always there for me even if it's, like, non-basketball stuff, off the court stuff.

Yeah, she also has won a national championship. So when you are around people who have accomplished things like that, like, you really want to pick their brain, ask them questions.

She's always in my ear on the sideline, like what I missed, what I could do in this situation. I'm super grateful for Sydney.

Q. This is for Madison and Jordan. It's been three and a half months, but you guys played a game in this building back in mid-December. Was there talk then about you could be back here in March? Also, just what benefit was it to play that game? Also, you had a pretty good win over an NCAA team.

JORDAN LEE: Absolutely. That was actually one of the reasons why Coach wanted to schedule that game was because we knew that was a possibility to be here towards the end of the year.

You know, there's a good advantage of having familiarity in being on the court, the way the (indiscernible) feel, backdrop, things of that nature. No, we're excited to be here, and especially in the state of Texas. That's super special to be representing in March.

MADISON BOOKER: It feels great. I mean, I think it's a tad bit different, but, no, I think we played a great game. I just hope we can build on it and come back and make more shots here.

Q. Maddie, this is your third tournament, third regional. If you think back to your first time around, where do you feel like you've grown the most and learning how to deliver and step up and to play your best basketball in moments like this?

MADISON BOOKER: I think it's more a mentality thing I think freshman year. I think I had just a lot of, you know, just shoes to fill with Rori being out and other things to worry about just how I was going to play my defense and

all those othering factors in the basketball game.

I think now transitioning to my junior year right now, it's more a mentality thing. It's more of a dog mentality and come out here and hunting for my shots and also making sure my teammates are getting open.

I think also being a leader too, being vocal. Make sure there's energy always on the court. Make sure my teammates are great and ready to play.

I think now it's just more of a mature mindset, making sure that we're prepared.

Q. Coach Schaefer talked about earlier how he was really proud of you and proud of the journey that you've had here. I wanted to know, how has he poured into you throughout the season, and then especially right now as you begin the Sweet 16 journey?

JORDAN LEE: I feel like it's super important to have someone that you kind of see as your role model, whether that's a coach or mentor to exhibit the work ethic they expect of you. And that's something when we're watching Coach Schaefer and all the work that he puts into whether it's a scout, the practice plan, whatever, that's something that's super inspiring to us. We want to step up and do our part as much as he can contribute and pours into us.

MADISON BOOKER: Yeah, I think when you have a coach that really loves the game of basketball and really prepares and shows passion, staying up late watching film and making sure that, you know, our team has everything we need to have and know before heading into a game day, I think as a player, you love to see somebody like that. Especially your head coach.

I think with the team, I think we see that, and we appreciate it a lot, especially it's all our coaches. Our whole coaching staff does it. We appreciate it a lot. We also want to give back to them and show them we appreciate them doing that by playing hard, making sure we're on our game and prepared. We don't have to do any of that. They do all of it. We just have to go to sleep, go to school, and then go play basketball.

They make it easy for us, so we kind of pay back by playing our best basketball.

RORI HARMON: Yeah, what they both said, since I'm last. Seeing someone who just is so passionate and competitive, that's me in a nutshell. That is exactly who I am, so whenever you come across somebody like Coach Schaefer who gives that every single day, never misses a day, is very consistent with that type of energy, that's all

you want to give on the court.

You just want to play as hard as you can and play with passion and competitiveness just like him.

Q. Jordan, Texas comes into this region as the No. 1 seed. You're going to have a lot of the fan support. How do you as a team maintain your focus against a team that you've already beaten once this year?

JORDAN LEE: I think it starts with our practice and habits. We know that I think Rori mentioned they're a better team, but so are we. It's important to not only improve on the things that we didn't do so well last game, but also pay attention to what's made them so good up until this point.

Q. ...has made more threes. When she played y'all only went 1 from 3 from the field in that regard. How repeatable do you think that performance is? What are your thoughts on her game in general?

JORDAN LEE: Well, No. 8 stepped up, and she went 4 for 5 from three. We definitely will have an eye out. It's part of knowing our personnel. Those two shooters I think make them prolific in their offensive ability to spread the floor. Tonie Morgan has I think averages, what is it, 7 or --

MADISON BOOKER: 6 or 7.

JORDAN LEE: Assists a game. That's something that we're going to be keyed on for our scouting and preparation.

Q. Rori, it was an emotional weekend last weekend obviously; your final moments on campus playing. How are you in general balancing the emotions of any game could be the final game and the pressure, if you feel it, that comes with it? Also, as a follow-up, thoughts on the WNBA CBA?

RORI HARMON: I'm going to -- I'll answer that second. Balancing is exactly the word I would use as far as like my emotions for just how grateful and honored I am to be able to play at the University of Texas for five years, and to have a send-off as great as I did in the last game that we just played versus Oregon was amazing.

I just have so much support, but I have to focus on trying to win as well. Like, I try to put my emotions aside and all the feelings and the sadness of this being the last run, but you're trying to make it as long as possible, so you got to really focus in and lock in on the game at hand.

Also, as far as the CBA for the WNBA, I mean, I'm super grateful that the people who were heavily involved in that

stood on business and handled it the way they needed to. It's very great for everyone. Not just the players that are in the league now, but players trying to get to the league.

I'm super grateful. I'm happy. It puts a really big smile on my face to see that they accomplished something that they've been working so hard for.

Q. Madison, somebody like Clara Strack doesn't necessarily need to score for Kentucky to be effective. What other areas do you need to be able to limit her effectiveness?

MADISON BOOKER: No, she is a tremendous player. Like you said, she doesn't need to score to impact the game for her team.

She's a great rebounder. I think also she has great chemistry with Teonni Key. I think we need to do a better job than last time with trying to deny her the ball, limit her touches a little bit, kind of make her work a little extra for it and block her out.

She's a big presence on the glass so, like you said, she doesn't need to score to really impact her team. But those areas right there, just touch the ball, it really changes their team.

Q. This is kind of a follow-up to Jordan, your answer before. When you are preparing for a team like Kentucky that you have played before, is that easier to do or does it make it -- make you a little bit more cautious in how you approach it?

JORDAN LEE: I would say it definitely makes our coaches a little bit more cautious. I would say their hours of preparation are probably doubled in film and just making sure they don't miss anything and potentially trying to anticipate what Kentucky's game plan is going to be.

But it's nice to have a little bit of familiarity with their sets and personnel and have that sort of feel of who we're going against. But I think it's definitely also, like I said, just a little bit got to be a little bit cautious for sure, and especially at this point in the year there's a lot at stake, and we want to go out and represent the University of Texas the best we can.

Q. Question again for all three of you. What is one thing that Coach Schaefer says that stands out to you all the time, like just one line that he says that sticks in your mind?

RORI HARMON: I was waiting because I thought Jordan -- she has all of the quotes. Go ahead.

JORDAN LEE: Probably defensively we have a lot of emphasis of taking away people's space, so one of my favorites is when he'll say, you can read a newspaper between you and the defender or we're not close enough (laughter).

I need to get more. Y'all go. I need to get more.

MADISON BOOKER: I don't know. Our bigs hedge a lot, so I think it's kind of funny seeing him do the Batman. That's what he calls it. He puts his arms out and --

RORI HARMON: Let's see.

MADISON BOOKER: I'm on the spot, so I don't hedge. Yeah, it's kind of funny just seeing him do the Batman. I think that's pretty funny to me.

JORDAN LEE: Yeah, it's a big analogy. He'll get out and make sure hands out, like when Batman holds the cape out. Just like that in practice. Just making sure our post players have a good emphasis on hedging.

RORI HARMON: Y'all were fresh. I am, like -- I'm just kidding. No, I don't. I think it's time for the next question (laughing). Oh, wait. I got one. Work to win, learn to live, and commit to compete.

JORDAN LEE: There you go.

Q. Rori, when you get to a game like this in which the stakes are so high, what do you think is the biggest mistake that your team can make?

RORI HARMON: Yeah, what Book just said about being complacent and then playing all tied up. You got to let loose and play the game of basketball. We've all been playing for ten-plus years, so we know what we're doing. We're here for a reason. We're at this point for a reason. Our coaches have put us in this position, so just go out there and play basketball and realize just because we're the 1 seed, that doesn't mean anything.

We're all competing. Nobody wants to go home. Nobody wants to lose, so just go out there, play basketball, fall back on your habits, and stay together as a team.

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