

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 2 Final - Duke vs South Carolina

Saturday, March 29, 2025

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Legacy Arena

**Duke Blue Devils**

**Kara Lawson**

Elite Eight Pregame Media Conference



**Q. Coach, I'm curious about your relationship with Dawn. I remember back in Beijing at the Olympics she was an assistant and you were playing then. Did you have a relationship with her then?**

**KARA LAWSON:** We cross paths a lot obviously with USA Basketball. She was an assistant coach on the team in Beijing that I played on, and then when I was coaching the three-on-three team or preparing to coach the three-on-three team in Tokyo, she was the five-on-five coach.

During COVID we had training camps down in Columbia, so I went down there and worked three-on-three and got to do some court coaching with the five-on-five team with her as the coach. And then in the run in Tokyo I did the broadcasting for the Tokyo games. So I would say that's where we have crossed paths the most is USA Basketball.

**Q. What do you remember about recruiting Reigan to Duke, whether it's initially or via the portal? And what can you say about the legacy she is leaving with you guys, in the program.**

**KARA LAWSON:** Reigan, when I got the job at Duke she was going into college. She was playing at -- she was going to play at Georgia, and she played her freshman year at Georgia. So I didn't know who Reigan was when I got to Duke because I didn't recruit that class of high school players.

Then when she came into the portal, I was of course very interested, being from Charlotte and she had gone to a high academic high school and just a player that was trending upwards because I watched her play at Georgia. I thought when the SEC started that year in January and February she started to get traction and play well.

So recruiting her -- she never answered the phone. I remember that. Initially. So if you call Reigan the first time, she never picks up. And then she'll always call you back but she never picks up. So I remember just being like, I don't know if she is that interested. Because I feel like sometimes if someone is interested, they're going to pick up when you call.

**THE MODERATOR:** Good morning. We are joined by Duke Head Coach, Kara Lawson. Coach?

**KARA LAWSON:** Excited to be here. Excited to have a good day of preparation for tomorrow's game. Obviously a great team, team with great experience, and a great history in March, and we're looking forward to the challenge.

**Q. Kara, how much more important does the survive and advance mentality become the deeper you get in this tournament? Yesterday you said it wasn't your best day offensively but even if it's ugly, a win is a win at this point?**

**KARA LAWSON:** Yeah, I don't think that style points are something you're worried about at any point in the tournament. You have to get a feel for the game, and each game has its own identity and each game is going to present a problem set for you that you have to try and figure out. Sometimes those problem sets you can anticipate, sometimes you can't.

So it's really about solving issues in the moment, and finding a way to fix them. I guess in a nutshell -- I can't say what other coaches or teams do, but I know what I try to do. There is something that's going to go unplanned and you have to figure out how to make it work.

So yesterday I was just proud of the group, that they figured out how to make it work. It was one of our worst shooting nights of the season but I thought the shot quality was high, and that happens sometimes.

But we didn't let it get us down and we defended at a really, really high level the whole way -- not the first five minutes. Not the whole way. Last 35 minutes, and we were able to get the win.



She is more soft-spoken, but very focused. I had a little bit of insight to how she was as a player and person because one of my assistant coaches, Karen Lange was at Georgia for Reigan's freshman year and was her position coach. So when Karen came to us at Duke, I was able to get some really great insight that you wouldn't have on a normal transfer because you have her position coach that worked with her for a year. And she spoke highly of her and what she felt her potential could be so that all fit together.

Reigan came on a visit and, you know, it was a good fit personality-wise I think for both of us. It's been challenging for us. We're very different in some ways, so we've had to really work at our relationship, but it's been -- overall it's just a great partnership that we have built and working together and spending time with one another and getting to know one another and having an understanding of one another I think is very valuable.

So when we do get frustrated with one another we know that it comes from a place of love and you trust that and that allows you to get deeper in different places with them because we both trust one another.

**Q. This is a good-of-the-game question, not particularly the women's game. Yesterday's second game took 30 minutes to play 30 seconds of clock time. Is there a solution to that? Do you think it can become a problem that the games drag on so much at the end that there is so much stoppage than there is play?**

KARA LAWSON: I don't know if I have a smart answer for your question, I did watch the end of the game but not in real time, but I was just able to skip through. So it didn't impact me. Maybe everybody should watch it on delay and they don't have to worry about it.

**Q. Coach, you and Coach Staley and Niele Ivey are all former WNBA players. I wonder how y'all are able to help players not develop their best college selves but have that possibility of playing beyond just because of your experience.**

KARA LAWSON: I think having walked a path before inherently makes it easier to guide someone along it. That doesn't mean that someone that's never walked a path can't be a guide. I think you can be a great coach from any background, but what I will say is I think overall people grossly underestimate the value of having been down the path before. Having walked in those shoes, I think it's much more of an advantage that people give it credit for.

And I think, and I'm not saying this in a mean way, I think the reason it is is because the people that are saying it's not never did it. When you've never done something, you make a lot of assumptions about how it should be done. When you've done something, you don't make any assumptions. You know every step that it took and you're able to guide people in every step that it takes.

So I think that sometimes former players get a bad rap in coaching, on both sides, on the men's and the women's side, and I think that we can coach at a really high level.

So I always root for former players to do well.

**Q. Kara, the last month or so you've got to reflect on where this program has been and where it's going. Who was the hardest sell when you first got the job in terms of recruiting? And why?**

KARA LAWSON: Probably all the ones I didn't get. I mean, I don't know that -- I think probably the early ones were harder than the later ones. They're all hard, but as the years having on, there was at least -- you could see something was happening. Two years ago we played for the ACC Championship on the final day of the season. You could see that we were coming.

So I would say just the beginning when there was nothing to see. There was nothing to see. Also in the beginning -- and this was true for every program but particularly hard for a coach that's starting out was we were in a period for a year that you couldn't leave campus to recruit. So you couldn't go watch games in person, you couldn't sit face to face with players, so it's hard to sell if you can't even be in the same room and look them in the eye to talk about your program. So we were on Zoom. That was the whole world at that time. So we were dealing with that. So if you think about starting a program in that instance, that's very difficult to do. So those were probably the hardest.

So that was that class, so that was like Ashlon, yeah, Ashlon Jackson. But it wasn't -- it was hard but it wasn't hard in the sense that, I don't know, we felt a great connection even over Zoom. It was very natural, but that was probably the group that we had to paint the picture of for so visually than we could say hey, look at this, watch our game, because we didn't even play that year. So there was no game to watch. So to look at style, talk about style, how we're going to play, all that, we didn't have anything, so it was just like, hey, please come!

**Q. Coach, Duke right now is the only school with the men's and women's team both in the Elite Eight. I know you and Coach Scheyer used to have interactions on early mornings in the weight room**

**when he was an assistant. What were your interactions, and what are those like now with Coach Scheyer?**

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KARA LAWSON: We still have interaction in the weight room. We were both in there lifting before we went to the Sweet 16.

Jon is a great coach, and it was easy to see early on when I got there, Coach K. was still the head coach and Jon was one of the assistants but it was easy to see that Jon was very prepared, very sharp, very in tune with what was going on and talking about basketball. We met when I first got there with the assistants, all the assistants and we just talked basketball, watched film together and things like that. That was a great time to share ideas.

Just through the course, I know he's been a great supporter of his and I try to be a great supporter of his. So we're texting each other every day really through this run, just words of support, although I haven't texted him yet yesterday and I don't think I'm that late because they play tonight late in the evening. So I will text him.

We were on the same days in the first and second rounds but they're a day ahead of us now. Yeah, rooting hard for them to go to the Final Four tonight and it's just a great camaraderie. He has done an incredible job of taking over the program and we talked a little bit about that before he was taking over, just -- he was trying to prepare to become a head coach and we met about -- he wasn't the head coach at Duke. He knew he was going to be a head coach in the future.

He had had asked me questions about when I took over the Duke program what were the things I focused on just as he was getting himself prepared to take over a job one day. So he's always been very prepared. That just shows a lot of forethought to be preparing yourself in the assistant coach seat, be preparing yourself for when you take over a program and be ready.

I don't think there is any doubt that he's been ready and it's great to have another coach leading their team deep in the tournament.

**Q. I just want to double-check that everybody is in good health for tomorrow? I know Toby was coming in yesterday after being injured. Nothing plaguing the team at all?**

KARA LAWSON: Yeah, as far as I know everybody is good to go.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

