

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

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Legacy Arena

## South Carolina Gamecocks

### Dawn Staley

#### Elite Eight Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by South Carolina Head Coach Dawn Staley.

**Q. Brenda said yesterday after the game she felt like it was a blueprint of how to beat South Carolina, some of the players felt it was similar to the Indiana game and what Maryland did. How do you go about fixing that, when a team feels they have a book out on you after just a day and a half?**

DAWN STALEY: The blueprint? People played us like that ever since we had Aliyah Boston. It's nothing new. We lead the country in points in the paint; clog the paint.

They did a good job executing their game plan and we did a poor job at shot selection. So we will be better. We just gotta take better shots. If you're open in the first five seconds of a shot clock, you're probably going to be open the last five seconds of the shot clock. So we just gotta take better rhythm shots and just fortunate that we're able to continue to play.

**Q. Today officially marks a decade since y'all clinched your first trip to Tampa and the Final Four. What do you remember of that day in Greensboro and how have you seen this game change?**

DAWN STALEY: Great question, Mingo. You were in our parent/child camp. Was it ten years ago? All right. I'm trying to remember.

I think Olivia Gaines hit a big shot in the corner, ball went up, came down, hit the rim a few times and that was kinda the play that sealed the deal for us. We played against North Carolina, correct? So Allisha Gray, so we had fun once Allisha Gray transferred into our program, we had fun talking about that particular moment. But it was just a great moment.



I think we had a pretty favorable crowd in Greensboro and everybody was just super happy. The Final Four being in Tampa was probably one of the best experiences that I've had. Obviously it was our first one, but it opens your eyes to really not wanting to go to the Final Four unless you're participating in it, because it's that much fun and that much just competitiveness and excitement.

So I mean, I'm glad that we have experienced that, and I think five other times since then. So it's cool. So it would be great, an honor to represent women's basketball in Tampa in this year's Final Four.

**Q. Coach, I would like to take you back 20 years you interviewed with the University of Alabama for that job, I believe. Can you tell us how that went down and how it played out? I want to say that you didn't want to retire yet and they wanted you to retire from active playing or was that part of it?**

DAWN STALEY: Was I playing then? I don't know if I was playing. I do remember Mal Moore, great man, great interview. Brought me to Alabama and took me around. For me, I'm a feeler. Like I like to feel being in the place and seeing myself in the place and once I got to Alabama, no offense, I just didn't feel myself. I was so young. I'm from Philly, and I didn't have an appreciation for the south at that point. Just too young and dumb to realize it.

But I enjoyed the people, the people. When you can't feel yourself in a place, it really is the people that allow you to kind of -- like if that was a non-negotiable, I would probably have to rethink that non-negotiable because of the people I've met.

**Q. Dawn, you were reflecting on the earlier season you said this team had to relearn how hard it is to win. I'm curious if you can talk through that process, getting them to understand how hard it is to do this on a day-to-day basis and the growth you've seen in them from that time?**

DAWN STALEY: I think anytime you are coming off a national championship, you are the targeted one.



Everybody, everybody wants to knock you off your throne. And with this particular team, they've never been in that situation where they've won and then they gotta defend the championship, defend it.

We went undefeated. So they tend to forget, like, you know, we had some close moments of losing that they just kinda tucked those moments away. Like we feel 'em as coaches every day. We feel where we are, we feel how we're playing. For them it's just like, okay, let's not think about the bad stuff. Let's only think about the shots I made. Let's think about the completed passes I made. And we're thinking about all the other stuff. And when they're not -- when they don't have all the other stuff in front of them and they only thinking about, you know, sweeping things under the rug it gets pretty hard.

So we have had to learn through losing to build some endurance of how hard it is and losing does that to you. You're either going to succumb to it or you're going to try to fight and get back to your habits, your winning habits of what it took for us to win.

So it's a great dynamic, it's a great process. One that, you know, you can embrace if there is understanding and growth and learning through losing.

**Q. Yesterday you complimented your coaches in terms of subbing. I would to narrow in on Khadijah. She is always bringing the energy but she is intentional about when she is in a player's ear and when she is backing off. Talk about the advantages of having a former player that isn't too far removed from the game on staff especially those vocal moments?**

DAWN STALEY: Yeah, and that young energy. She's got it. She's got it. I think Khadijah has a real good feel for the game because she played it at really a high level. She understands where the pitfalls of young players and where they are today and how hard they need to work. Like, I don't think young people understand how hard they need to work in order for them to get what they want in life.

So she's real good at it. She's got a real good relationship with MiLaysia, and MiLaysia listens to her. MiLaysia trusts her. So when I'm getting on MiLaysia, Khadijah has probably a more kinder, calmer interpretation of what I meant.

**Q. Sania was saying when you were recruiting her you would call her every Monday or Monday evening. What do you remember about recruiting Sania to South Carolina? What moments -- what growth moments have you seen, observed over the last couple of years at this point?**

DAWN STALEY: Yeah, we did used to call Mondays -- Mondays was a Bible study night for her family. So she would call me after Bible study. She gave me instant, you know, just topic of conversation. We talked about the Bible scripture that they read from and she would just explain it. It was cool to get her to just -- she's a talker. Like, she really likes to talk.

She was one that I really enjoyed talking to because it -- she did most of the talking. I would ask a question and she would just -- she goes off. And it was cool just to see the family dynamic, really strong family, faith-based family, close-knit family and when you get a family like the Feagins, you get the entire family, the good and the bad and the ugly of it, which I don't think there is any. You just get the truth. Like they want her to be great. They know that she needed a coach that would hold her to her standard.

And throughout the process that doesn't mean they don't get frustrated with the although of time that she plays or whether she starts or doesn't start. It just means that they respect the process. And through, like, really frank communication, it wasn't a doubt -- like I never questioned whether or not she was going to transfer. Because her mother -- I mean, they had a strong belief that this is where growth is taking place, even though it didn't produce more playing time, she saw her daughter grow. And that's the most important piece.

**Q. Dawn, as you guys have moved through this tournament and your players obviously want to win another championship, have you felt any sort of pressure kind of building with them as you have gone through these last couple games, knowing it's getting harder and harder?**

DAWN STALEY: No, I don't. I don't. Young people are a lot different than when we played. Like, they fear nothing. Like they -- you can't see it. Maybe they do it outside of us. I doubt it. I doubt it, but, you know, as a coach you have to just -- if that's your team, if that's the make-up of your team where they don't feel the pressure -- maybe individuals may feel a little bit of pressure but the overall team, I think they rely on the trust that they built with each other and the experience.

We got experience playing in the Elite Eight over the past four, five years, so hopefully we will be able to tap into some of that and they are tapping into some of that. Not saying that we're overly confident because we're not.

There is a space where you've been here before. So, you know, the nerves are put to the side and you get to your

habits a lot quicker hopefully than someone who hasn't been here a whole lot.

**Q. Coach, you talked about the special relationship that you have with Plies and his support. Just curious if you saw his tweet last night saying he better not see anymore TikTok videos and he wants the gym to get in the game and get locked in. What was your reaction to that?**

DAWN STALEY: I think Plies sums up what probably all of our fans would like to see is our players locked in, ready to go, and -- but that's just not this era of players. You can fight it all you want to fight it, you can take the phones away, they got other devices. I guess, you know, it's not worth it.

You have to allow them their space. It's part of their decompressing. It's part of their -- sometimes you gotta compartmentalize. Their approach can't be, like, all basketball because at some point they'll mentally tire of it. Then they can't perform when it's time to perform.

So God bless Plies, they're not going to do it, although they'll probably look at the post and maybe think about it, but they'll keep scrolling.

**Q. Coach, Kara Lawson was up here talking about all the times you guys have crossed paths and obviously both champions. Curious what your relationship with her is like, and then to be on the same stage with also a very successful player and coach.**

DAWN STALEY: Our relationship is of respect. I respect the success that Kara is having at Duke. I respect the fact that she has been in our game for a long time at different stops, you know, commentating, NBA assistant. I think she did radio for the Wizards, or maybe it was TV. I just respect the fact that she has given to our game for a very long time. She is an Olympian, she is an Olympic assistant coach.

So for someone that has devoted and served our game as long as she has, you gotta tip your hat to her.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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