

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 2 Semifinal - Duke vs LSU

Friday, March 27, 2026

Sacramento, California, USA

Golden 1 Center

**Duke Blue Devils**

**Coach Kara Lawson**

**Ashlon Jackson**

**Taina Mair**

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Duke - 87, LSU - 85

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Duke head coach Kara Lawson and student-athletes Ashlon Jackson and Taina Mair.

KARA LAWSON: I thought it was an incredible game. Both teams played so hard. It was fitting it came down to the last possession.

We had squandered away a little bit of a lead there late and luckily got another opportunity with two and a half seconds left. And there was no doubt who I was going to in that situation. It was 3.

And just made an unbelievable play. I'm so proud of our team's resilience. It can weigh on you mentally late in the game when you squander a lead and the other team takes it. And it can weigh on you. And we stayed so strong in those huddles. And all their eyes were on me, and we were very purposeful in what we wanted to do and our execution on that last play was great.

Now we're headed to the Elite Eight. So couldn't be more proud. But I am not surprised, not one bit.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

**Q. Ashlon, before that big amazing shot you were 1-for-7 from deep. Talk about the confidence to stay with it and take the last shot and make it, obviously.**

ASHLON JACKSON: My teammates and my coaches, they trust me and they believe in me. And whenever shots



aren't really falling for me, I can't really hang my head. That's just how the game goes. Every competitor knows that.

But just having that faith from them and the belief from them is really all I needed. It's pretty simple. That's pretty much it.

**Q. Ashlon, you missed those two free throws before that. So what was going through your mind that you had to take that last shot?**

ASHLON JACKSON: Again, I couldn't really hang my head with that. It's basketball. I would have loved to have made those free throws, but I knew I had to focus on the next play in order for us to even have a chance of winning.

And I knew if I would have just gave in, everybody else will fall. I couldn't just really do that. So I just had to stay the course.

And, like I said, the belief from my teammates and my coaches, that's pretty much all I needed.

**Q. I'd like to hear you both speak to the multiple double-digit runs there were in the fourth quarter. Your team started off with an 11-0 run early in the fourth quarter with three and-1s, and then you were up by nine. LSU went on a 10-0 run, put you down by one before you hit the shot. Just speak to the mentality and what kept the team together on both sides of each run?**

TAINA MAIR: I think basketball is just a game of runs. We knew they were going to go on a run eventually throughout the game. The fact that they went on one in the fourth quarter, I mean, obviously it's not what we wanted. But it happened.

And then Ashlon hits a big-time shot. And we just trusted her, and then we ended up with the win.

ASHLON JACKSON: Same answer.

**Q. LSU, two 100-point games before coming to this.**



**What went into limiting that offense and then taking advantage of those opportunities and showing what you guys can do on the other side of the floor?**

ASHLON JACKSON: Just like Taina said, basketball is a game of runs. And that's a great team with great players and a great coaches. So we knew it was just a matter of time before they started to click.

But just really buckling down and controlling what we could in order to get over. But yeah, it's simple.

**Q. Ash, what does it mean to hear Coach say that she knew she was going to you in that situation?**

ASHLON JACKSON: Honestly, I feel like I've been crying all season long. But really just having her here for me. Not just for me, but for my team. You know, she has so much faith and trust in everyone that she has coached.

And just being able to, in that moment, have her back, this woman, she has our back all the time, all year long. She has spoken up for us, just everything.

So just being able to at least reward her with that, that's only a small token. But yeah, it means the world to me, for sure.

**Q. Ashlon, have you hit a buzzer-beater recently before in your career, and the ball got stuck in the rim for a bit and rolled around. I mean, how did it feel, did the time stand still as that shot was up there? It wasn't obviously a clean 3.**

ASHLON JACKSON: I've never had a game-winner but I had plenty of buzzer-beaters before. The way it went in, I felt like I was in a dream and it was just, you know, playing back over and over again before the ball went in. So just having that, it was a great feeling, for sure.

**Q. Obviously a big win tonight, but y'all have to go Sunday and play No. 1 seed UCLA. How are you all going to prepare for that? What goes into making sure taking down kind of a juggernaut team like that?**

TAINA MAIR: They're an amazing team. And getting ready for them starts today with our recovery. Then we'll get to practice, doing all that, and we'll be ready on Sunday.

**Q. Ashlon, just getting to the shot, right, like the way you were being defended, the fake, all of that, can you just take us through from when the ball got swung to you to getting it up on the rim?**

ASHLON JACKSON: I would just say it was really simple in my mind. Just went. I really don't know how else to explain it. It was just that simple, as far as whenever my number was called, I had to deliver.

It was a great defense, for sure. Just being able to get the ball and being fully denied, it was pretty tough. That was really the only thing that was going through my mind.

**Q. On the post-Selection Sunday Zoom called I asked you if there was a little extra get-back because you're going to get a chance to get back at some of the teams that you guys had during that well-discussed losing streak. I know you got one more, but is there any extra having done two of those?**

TAINA MAIR: No, I think we're just going to focus on just playing UCLA, not looking at it as a revenge game or anything, just playing it as a regular game.

**Q. In that run where LSU was coming back, could you feel LSU flip a switch and kind of that competitive nature kind of uptick a little bit?**

TAINA MAIR: Yeah, they're a super competitive team. We understood that it's the last three minutes of the game. And they're down, so they're going to try everything to win. So it wasn't out of the ordinary of what we've seen from them before, especially if we look back in December.

They're a super competitive team. And they try to will their way to the win. That's what we expected, especially in March.

**Q. Ashlon, you do realize that by the time you probably are a grandparent they'll still be replaying this shot right now. So this is one of these big moments that we'll be talking about for decades. How do you feel about that?**

ASHLON JACKSON: I'm very blessed in order to have that moment. It's such a great feeling. Like I told my teammates, it really doesn't even feel real right now. I feel like I'm cloud nine. But to be in that conversation is really a blessing.

**Q. Taina, just kind of throughout the game, it was an up-and-down game, really. Like you said, a game of runs. You guys made a run. They made a run. But throughout the game, you kind of stayed poised from attacking inside and from long distance. Just how were you able to stay poised and kind of bring it for your team, especially through those lulls throughout the game?**

TAINA MAIR: I think whatever this team needs me to do I'm willing to do it, whether that's scoring, rebounding or just making the one more pass. I'm just willing to do what it takes to win.

When I have to be able to score, I'm going to take that on, full head on. And I feel like I did that today with scoring and everything, so I just had to do what it took to win.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

**Q. After the win, you jumped in the stands and were celebrating with Chelsea Gray. Can you explain what you were feeling in that moment and why it was important to celebrate with her?**

KARA LAWSON: Was that a jump? You're giving me good credit. I think I've declined. I don't think my vertical's that good anymore. But I'll take "jump." Put that in the --

I mean Chelsea is obviously our most decorated alum when you look at what she's done at the professional level. Such a great supporter. Obviously I get to coach her now, too, with the national team. And we have a great relationship.

And she flew in here for this game to support us. She was excited. We were all excited. When you have success as an individual, just as a human -- doesn't have to be a game, doesn't have to be a buzzer beater -- you want to share that with the people that have been there for you. And so that section is a group that's been there for us.

They sat there when we were 3-6, too. And they supported us. It felt right to celebrate with them because they're the biggest reasons why we're all here.

**Q. You won a championship in this city. I wonder if you allow this moment, even though it's a Sweet 16, to kind of creep into the great moments you've experienced in this city, because even in the moment you looked pretty stoic. When the ball is circling the rim, it goes in, you look right at Kim and went right for her. Just kind of seeing where this might rank for you?**

KARA LAWSON: I love this city so much. I'm telling you, everywhere I've gone, as we're walking down the street, people are, like, hey, man, thanks for that title, thanks for that championship. Wherever I've gone people have just been stopping me the whole way and such a love affair with this city and its people and its fans. It's one of the great basketball towns in the country. It really is.

And to be here and to be able to come back now as a

coach and even though this city saw me as a player, it's really cool. It's really cool. And to see the banner hanging up there in the arena bowl is really special.

So I feel connected here. And even just walking through, I mean, the back of the house, seeing all the security that I used to see, and I'm walking through and they're like Monarch coming through as I'm walking back there, it feels really good to be acknowledged in that way for what our team did.

**Q. Coming into this game, being that it's like a homecoming for you, did it have any extra -- you don't need extra motivation to win -- but did getting a victory in this round here in Sacramento, is it any more special than, let's say, another year?**

KARA LAWSON: I think anytime you can have a victory in a place that means something to you, yeah, it's definitely a little more special. It's still -- for my players, it's especially because we're going to the Elite Eight. They don't even remember me playing, or I think they know I played, but they don't really remember me playing. So for them it's just an opportunity to get to a game that they can play to go to the Final Four.

But for me, yeah, it's special to win a game here in this arena. I didn't play in this arena. Obviously I played in Arco. But it's really cool to be back.

**Q. Your emotions kind of went in waves from that graceful moment with Coach Mulkey to there was this quiet reflection as you watched your players doing the postgame interview, on to the stands, even your emotions when Ashlon was talking about you on stage, just what have the last 40 minutes or so been like for you? Are you still processing?**

KARA LAWSON: I think in the late-game moments, as a coach, you're trying to stay poised and calm for them because they take their cues from me. If I have anxious eyes or anxious body language or frustration bubbling over when I'm speaking to them, I know that that can kind of seep into their belief in what they think they can do. So I have to be purposeful with that, to remind myself of that.

There's a lot of talking that goes on to myself, in my head, in those moments of what I need to focus on and what messaging I need to give to them, because it's important in those timeouts, and the execution, to be clear and make sure you're giving the right instruction.

When the shot went in, yeah, I'm not a big reactor in that way. I just wanted to shake Kim's hand and express what a great season they had. In moments of victory or defeat, I

think it's really important to be respectful. And it's something we try to do all the time. Whether we win or we lose, we're going to have respectful interaction.

So that's what I tried to do and tell each player what a great season they had and how much I admire the way that they play. So the time to celebrate, when you're the winning team, you always have time to do that. Your time to congratulate and to show respect is in the immediacy right there.

So that's why I stayed calm because that's what's most important, that you show respect to the people you compete against. And we want to be a program that wins with class and loses with class. So that was the most top-of-mind thing as that was going on after we got through the line.

Yes, of course, you celebrate with your team and with your fans. And I think it's okay to do that after that point.

**Q. We're still trying to find out your LSAT scores. We thought you was going to be an attorney a few years ago. You've been in the broadcasting booth, been an analyst. Coaching the Olympic team. Yes, you did win a title for Sacramento as well. But now you're on the coaching sidelines. It seems like when you see how you interact with your coaching staff and your student-athletes, you were made for this. And this is the only thing that you wanted. Could you kind of explain why you chose coaching over all the other activities that you were going through before you got to Duke?**

KARA LAWSON: Well, I knew I wanted to be a coach when I was 7 years old. That's when I knew that that's what I would do.

I grew up in the DMV, and it's a big basketball area. I have like players from the DMV here on this team at Duke -- Thomas, Nelson, Donovan and Olivia Martin. And we have another one coming in next year, Autumn Fleary. Tough, tough, tough players come from the DMV. Tough, tough, tough people.

And the high school basketball there is awesome. Friday nights, my dad used to take me to the top high school game on Friday nights, whether it was girls or boys. And when I walked in those gyms, like, I knew that's what I wanted to do when I was 7. I knew I wanted to be a coach.

And you know everything for me is built toward that. When I was playing, I got to play for great coaches. I was always taking notes. When I became a broadcaster, it was awesome. I got to go in the practices and the

shoot-arounds of the top coaches in men's and women's college basketball. When I was broadcasting in the NBA, I got to watch practices.

And formative here, I mean, I said this yesterday, Jerry Reynolds came by our practice yesterday. He's a legend here. He taught me a lot about the game. Scotty Stirling, an old Kings scout, he taught me a lot about the game. Coachie, Pete Carroll, was here. He used to give me VHS tapes and say, go watch this offense and come back tell me what you think.

And so I just had a lot of people that poured into me. Obviously Coach Summitt was the biggest influence to me in coaching. Got to play for a lot of people in the pros. And so you take a ton of things, and now I've gotten to coach a lot of great players, coach with a lot of different people, and you just continue to take different things and you learn and you just keep adding and adding to your wisdom.

So, yeah, I agree with you. I know I'm made for this. And I don't think it. I know I am. And that doesn't mean I think I'm better than anybody. But I think when you're walking and aligned in your purpose and what you're meant to do and you're doing it at the place that you're supposed to be doing it at, with the players that you're supposed to be doing it with, it allows you to just be so clear-minded on things.

Like, I don't get distracted by anything on the outside because I know I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing. And it's a great feeling to be there.

We're only there in certain times in our life. Sometimes we're bouncing around, we're only there in certain times of our life where we know we're where we're supposed to be doing what we're supposed to be doing.

And when you get there in your life, you better stay there. You better stay there because that's where you're meant to be.

It's an awesome feeling to be the head coach at Duke. And I'm so proud of my team to be playing to go to the Final Four on Sunday.

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