

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 1 Semifinal - North Carolina vs UConn

Friday, March 27, 2026

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

**UConn Huskies**

**Coach Geno Auriemma**

**Azzi Fudd**

**Blanca Quinonez**

**Sarah Strong**

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

UConn 63, North Carolina 42

THE MODERATOR: We welcome the UConn huskies. We have Coach Geno Auriemma and student-athletes Blanca Quinonez, Sarah Strong and Azzi Fudd. We'll open up with a statement from Coach Auriemma and then questions for our student-athletes.

GENO AURIEMMA: Well, you know, we kind of go into these games knowing that you're going to have to be able to handle whatever happens that day, and however the game is being played you're going to have to figure out a way to win the game that way.

I thought we did a great job of that, especially defensively that first half we were about as good as you want to be. Then that third quarter our offense caught up to our defense, and we kind of separated ourselves.

You know, whenever you get to this point, you're going to play a really good team, and certainly North Carolina is. We knew it was going to be difficult, and it was. So congratulations to them. You know, we're looking forward to Sunday.

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

**Q. Azzi, can you just talk about the energy in the offense that Blanca brought in for you guys when you**



**needed a spark there in the first half?**

AZZI FUDD: Blanca was great tonight, and what she brought off the bench, the way she came in aggressive, on the attack, was exactly what we needed.

Being able to penetrate their defense, get in the paint, either put up a shot, kick it out, and then her crash the boards and playing great defense was -- I mean, like you said, it was a game changer.

It helped us when it felt like we were in a little lull, and she came in and changed the energy we needed.

**Q. This is for all three of you. Obviously just kind of looking ahead after this game, you'll play Notre Dame, and that's by and large kind of considered your biggest rival. What's the difference between when you played them earlier this season and now? I guess, between both teams.**

AZZI FUDD: Yeah, I mean, we've had a lot of time to work on our offense, our defense, our chemistry. I feel like we're in a much better place, what am I trying to say -- just as a whole. Today the way that we played, I feel like our half-court defense, our half-court offense, there are some things we can fine-tune and clean up, but I thought that we did a great job today, and that's something that we've been working on since that last game with Notre Dame.

So we're definitely a different team, and so are they. We're looking forward to it.

SARAH STRONG: I really don't know. We're a lot sharper. At things that we needed to get better at, we're better. For them I don't really know. I'm just focused on us.

BLANCA QUINONEZ: Yeah, I think we just have to play hard and approach the game as the same we were doing, like, the last 36 games. We have to play hard and be smart.

**Q. Sarah, just talk about in the second quarter you guys were kind of going, but you had four straight**



**baskets. You scored 11 in the second quarter. Talk about what you got you going and talk about how that helped this team going after halftime?**

SARAH STRONG: I started looking at the score being more aggressive, and I know that probably opens up my teammates. It gives me confidence to keep doing it, and gives my team confidence to keep shooting and keep playing well, stuff like that.

**Q. Sarah, your team shoots 40% from the field and 20% from three and still wins by over 20. Can you speak to the level of intensity and the will on the defensive side of the floor as a team today?**

SARAH STRONG: Yeah, I feel like it's our mentality. It's what we do every day in practice. We focus on that all the time, so we take all that stuff personal, and we try to do that every game.

**Q. Blanca, you heard Azzi mention before how much your performance was a game-changer today. How do you feel about your performance and the ability to impact the game the way you did today?**

BLANCA QUINONEZ: I mean, I'm always trying to just go on the court and just impact the game. Try to bring something to the court and to my teammates. Always try to do my best for the team and just have fun out there. I'm good, but I think we have another game Sunday, so we have to be focused on it.

**Q. Blanca, when you go into the game, your mindset to bring some offense or attack inside, because you seemed to go right into their post and really get things started offensively?**

BLANCA QUINONEZ: I mean, I am trying to read what is going on the court. That's something more that I have coming from the bench. Just try to see a little bit the game before I get in. But I'm just, like I say, try to do the best for the team and just reading what's going on.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies. Questions for Coach.

**Q. I was watching you while you were on the sideline. I know obviously you're very intense, very, very much paying attention, of course, to what's going on. How do you keep that intensity up after being to so many Sweet 16s and obviously so many national championship games as well?**

GENO AURIEMMA: It's frustration. It's not really intensity. The interesting thing is I may have been to a lot of these,

you know. Some of these players, they're still the same age as the first time I went to one of these, so they bring out the same bad side of you as they did 40 years ago. You know, 35 years ago.

Even if you don't have it, you can't help but express it the way things go sometimes, you know.

You know, when it's a game of miss, miss, miss, and there's a lot of angst about shots not going in and trying to get -- you have to get stops because it's so hard to get a bucket. Then you get a layup, and you miss it.

But no, I know how much they want to win this game. You know, they want to win this game badly, and I want that for them. So it's a great relationship that we have. They drive me crazy, and I give it back to them (laughing).

**Q. Geno, two things. Did you say anything during the first timeout to kind of snap them out of their little shooting funk that they were in, but you were getting good shots? Then, second, can you just talk about the approach that Blanca had coming in and attacking inside and getting something going there rather than throwing up threes or anything like that?**

GENO AURIEMMA: Well, actually the first time she touched it, she missed a three really bad. We had just talked about you have to give yourself a chance to touch the ball, get a feel for things before you start doing that. She's at her best when she's putting the ball on the floor and getting to the rim.

You know, she just is so strong and so quick. She's tough to keep away from the basket, and I would rather her do that when she gets in the game than, you know, take a shot that's not the easiest shot to make.

Especially when you consider we were 4 for 20 from the three-point line. North Carolina helped out. They were 4 for 22. So you've got two pretty good teams that are pretty decent three-point shooters shooting 8 for 42. You wonder, how does that happen? Do you ever notice when you come to the regionals they use brand new baskets? These rims have never touched a basketball until now, so it's hard. You can't get a ball to go boop, boop, in.

Once that ball hits the rim, it's going out of bounds. It's the weirdest thing. I'm sure TCU would have lent them some baskets. They make a lot of shots, those guys. I'm sure if you asked Campbell and you asked Jamie, they would have volunteered some baskets.

It's hard. It's hard to make shots in the postseason. They just break out these new baskets, new rims, and then it

gets in the kids' heads. You look at how many shots were missed today, and you just shake your head.

Yeah, I tell them make them. First timeout I said, make some, and they did. They made 4 out of 20.

**Q. You talked about your offense caught up with your defense, but what about Sarah in the second quarter? She kind of took over there and had the four straight in two minutes I think it was.**

GENO AURIEMMA: The hardest job that we as coaches have is getting her to do that for not seven minutes but 27 minutes. To act like that, to think like that, you know, to impose herself on the game like that. It's a real challenge.

When I coach guys' basketball, that's one word that never came out of my mouth: you need to shoot more. You know? So it's kind of one of those things that she just plays the way she plays, and you have to really, really work hard at it to get her to do that. Then when she does it, she makes it look so easy. It's effortless, you know?

The second half one time North Carolina went into a zone and we ran this little cut, and she caught it right around the foul line. Turned around, knocked it in. She had a big smile on her face, like this is easy, and it's not. If you have any suggestions, I'm open. I'm open to them.

**Q. What was it that North Carolina's defense -- what was it that they did in the first half that made it so hard for you guys?**

GENO AURIEMMA: Well, we went into the game feeling like we have to be more aggressive with the ball. We have to try to score earlier in the possession because once they get their defense set, they're really, really good. They're a really good defensive team. They're physical. It's hard to cut. It's hard to get to the rim against them because of the way they play off the ball.

So, you know, our whole thing was we need to score earlier and we need to play a little quicker, and that's exactly what we did in the third quarter. We came out, and we played much quicker and got more shots up earlier in our possession rather than later.

**Q. Geno, you guys a set national record for steals today in a season. Can you just talk about the ability you guys have to get after people, disrupt teams? That's a pretty impressive mark for you guys to break.**

GENO AURIEMMA: Sometimes you just have the kind of team that enjoys playing like that, and you have players that have that kind of mindset. It's really just a mindset and

a constant pressure leads to the other team making mistakes. Even sometimes when you don't, you know -- aren't even trying your hardest to get a steal or turnover, because of the constant pressure, the effect that it has. Players get a little bit tired. They get a little bit, you know, lackadaisical.

You know, it's something that this team likes to do. We have players that do it. I didn't know there was any record available to steal, but we do have a lot of them over the season, and we do force a lot of turnovers. Again, I think that's a big part of why we win. It's hard to play against a team unless you can force turnovers.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports