

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 4 Semifinal - Oklahoma vs South Carolina

Saturday, March 28, 2026

Sacramento, California, USA

Golden 1 Center

South Carolina Gamecocks

Coach Dawn Staley

Raven Johnson

Ta'Niya Latson

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

South Carolina - 94, Oklahoma - 68

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by South Carolina head coach Dawn Staley and Raven Johnson and Ta'Niya Latson.

DAWN STALEY: First, I want to congratulate Oklahoma on a great year. We're very fortunate that -- fortunate/unfortunate that we at least have an SEC team in the Elite Eight, at least one. Actually, we've got Texas, right? Is that it? For right now?

Okay. So, I mean, I attribute us advancing just playing in the type of league that we play in. It prepares you. It prepares you to be able to continue to advance. It is unfortunate that we end up having to play one of our very own. The good thing about it is that one of us will be representing the league in the Elite Eight.

Q. (Off microphone)?

TA'NIYA LATSON: I was feeling really good tonight. I woke up on the right side of the bed. My teammates and my coaches, they believed in me. I just had to go out there with confidence. That was the game plan.

Q. Curious what your feeling is when every time you look at the sideline and you see Dawn, she's wearing a shirt with your face on it. And just what's the experience of playing through that?

RAVEN JOHNSON: I see my beautiful self, sure. I see it.



I'm happy she's wearing my shirt. I mean, she has a beautiful person on her chest.

Q. Raven, have you guys played your best game yet? Do you still have the capability of upping your game, the whole team? And are you encouraged by that too?

RAVEN JOHNSON: Oh, yeah, we have a lot of room to grow. I think we're growing at the right time.

It's crazy because our bigs, they can do -- I thought they did really good with what -- okay. They took what they were given, and I think they did a really good job of that.

I think we have a lot of room to grow. And everybody's clicking. I feel like the ceiling is high for us.

Q. You've both played really strong games, and I'm just thinking about how last March, tonight, you entered the portal. Now you're here playing alongside Raven. Do you ever have a moment of oh, my gosh, this is so cool, we're doing this together, thinking about being teammates way back when in high school and in your childhoods to now?

TA'NIYA LATSON: Yeah, it's such a surreal moment. We kept in touch while I was at Florida State. So being on the sideline, being next to her even in practice it's just, like, dang, I'm playing with my best friend from high school.

We cherish the moments that we have on the floor and we hope to win a championship together. It's just a blessing to be together in our last year together.

Q. Raven, I want to ask you about a moment in the second quarter where you're on the sideline about to check in, and Maddy McDaniel is running a play. And you are talking to her even though you're in the sideline. Just the leadership that you've seen in yourself grow and develop that even in those moments when you're not in the game you can still lead the team and still help these younger guards and this whole group be better. What is it about you that's been able to find that moment and find those situations?



RAVEN JOHNSON: I've been here, what, four, five -- five times now. I think experience does matter. And I think using my voice goes a long way. They listen.

And when Maddy's on the floor I try to calm her down. She's next up, and I think she's doing a really good job of learning and leading us too.

Q. Your offense through these first three games of this tournament, it's been very high producing. And Raven you said you still think that you guys can get to another level. So two-part question. What has felt so good about your guys' offense so far through this tournament? And then what has to happen for you to unlock that next level up?

RAVEN JOHNSON: I think we're being patient in our offense. I think everyone is sharing the ball. We're making the right reads. Like, first option, you're always going to have that shot on the fifth, sixth option. I think Coach has been emphasizing that in practice. And I think they do a really good job of being on our butts in practice about that. So I think y'all seen the results of how they are with us in practice.

Q. With the years of Westlake included, was this the best game that y'all played together?

TA'NIYA LATSON: No, not the best. I think it was GEICO Nationals. She had like 25, I had like 26. It was like a monster game for both of us. The defense, we was turning everybody over.

Q. Raven, watching Ta'Niya have this kind of game after playing the role you did and bringing her here and having the history you have, how did you feel watching her do this on this stage?

RAVEN JOHNSON: I was just telling her how proud I am of what she did today. And I was, like, I feel like I did that. I'm so happy. When I see the ball go in for her, I'm like, yes, like my eyes get big.

All the things she's been through, I mean, Ta'Niya is like a hard worker. Like she does things and she also believe in God a lot. She prays a lot and she always tell me to let go, let God a lot. And whatever is meant for you is meant for you.

So, I mean, we talk a lot not just about basketball about life things. And Ta'Niya, I think, she deserves everything that's coming her way. I think this is just the beginning.

Q. Coach just talked about the defense, but tonight you guys really made Aaliyah Chavez and the other

guards from Oklahoma's life really, really difficult. What was it about this match-up that you guys really said, hey, we've got to go in and put in our best effort defensively, because this is only the third time all year they've been held under 70 points?

TA'NIYA LATSON: We didn't do that the first time we played them. We had to make that adjustment. We didn't do that until like the last two minutes of the last game.

So we knew we had to come out start to finish and we had to hit with the first punch. We had to make everything difficult for Chavez. She's a really good freshman. We know that she can shoot the ball. But we just tried to make it hard for all their guards.

Q. Ta'Niya, this is your first real run in the NCAA Tournament. What has it been like playing your first Sweet 16 and having the success you did today?

TA'NIYA LATSON: It's been fun. I've had a good time. My teammates, they give me confidence. Coming in, I feel a certain sense of like calmness because they have that confidence walking in with their head high. I feel good coming in with my head held high.

I feel I approached that game this way. And they just give me so much confidence. And I'm just happy to be here.

Q. What do you make of your South Carolina fans in the stands today? They were just loud from the beginning to the end cheering for you guys. What do you make of that?

TA'NIYA LATSON: I'm just happy that they're here to support us. I knew it cost a lot to come here and support. They traveled across the country for us. Just seeing the fans out there and seeing our parents and our siblings out there, it means a lot. And it definitely gives us energy. I'm just thankful for them coming.

RAVEN JOHNSON: Yeah, that's normal. That's what they do. (Indiscernible) fans in the country. That's what we call them, the fans.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for coach.

Q. After the guards gave you the hot start, there were quite a few possessions where y'all took it deep into the shot clock and then somebody else would hit. Was that by design or necessity?

DAWN STALEY: By design. I think when we have advantageous basketball, we need to play what's given to us and if we don't, then we want to just be a little bit more

patient, see if we can get a couple of reversals and get maybe some easier looks, because a lot of times defenses are a little impatient. If you can wait a little bit longer, you can get cleaner looks, and everybody feels good because they've touched the ball.

Q. I'm watching you and Raven interact right now as Ta'Niya's talking. I asked you yesterday just about how much she means to you. But in a moment like this, for her to have a game like this and her leadership -- I watched her all game today just lead and lead in different moments. You asked her to slow down. You asked her to run a set. How much has she meant to this group and her ability to lead in moments like this because she's been here a million times?

DAWN STALEY: I mean, I'm super happy for Raven. Raven's been through a lot. She's standing strong today and she's performing at a high level, which we all know she was capable of playing at this level.

But she sacrificed a lot of her beginnings and actually some of her end of her South Carolina career by just being a giver, by just being a winner and making winning plays.

Fortunately for us, we need her to score. We really do need her as a part of taking really good shots. I think the game has slowed down for her enough to where she knows where she needs to implant herself in scoring the basketball for us.

And today was just beautiful to see, just her taking those shots. Because the time she's had a core group of players, like the Kamillas and like the Freshies, like when she's had those group of players, she was probably the fifth option. And she didn't mind being fifth option. She's probably option number two or three in the depth chart of getting shots. But she can manufacture her own shot at this point.

So I'm just happy she played efficiently. She's leading, I mean, she's leading beyond the game. She's leading in shoot-around. She's leading at the hotel because she wants to win. And she wants everybody to all be on the same page and have that winning attitude.

Q. How would you categorize Madina Okot's impact on this game, especially with the tough match-up inside she had?

DAWN STALEY: You know, Madina, to me, is probably one of her stronger games just from a mental standpoint. The last time we played Oklahoma, she was on a mental struggle bus. It was the whole pressure of playing for us and having to perform at a high level for us.

She didn't get the points that she probably wanted to get. But the rebounding, she's able to turn a page and know that her contributions in other areas help us win.

I like where she is right now. I like the fact that she just wants to win. She's Raven's roommate for a reason, and she's starting to just talk like Raven about just making an impact and just wanting to win.

Q. Seemed like you have such a good balance where your kids play hard, they're disciplined, they take it serious. But you have fun wearing Raven's shirt. How do you balance that? And is it healthy to have some fun when it's so serious too?

DAWN STALEY: I mean, it is. I mean, they're young people that have a lot on their plate. They have a lot of people coming at them wanting things, right? They want things.

I think for us and how we've operated at South Carolina, we just gotta prioritize and we've got to compartmentalize. There's a place for everything that you want to do. It's about prioritizing.

For me, they probably call me a little bit of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hide because I give each moment its place. If I feel like laughing in the middle of practice, I'm going to crack up, right? But I can turn it off to get back into where we were. I think they've probably taken a little bit out of that.

Like, I want them to be who they are, you know? It's not always being serious. It's not always being in the gym. There's a balance to everything we do. We just try to prepare them for life, and life isn't just one dimensional.

Q. Your players are saying how there's still a next level, still room to grow. The point differential you put up against your opponent so far is quite a large one. Where do you see room to grow as you head into the Elite Eight, and where do you want to see your players improve?

DAWN STALEY: I'd like for us to be a little bit better at putting the ball in the paint and scoring. We're used to having a dominant post that can alleviate some of the pressures that are happening, especially in the half court.

I think we can be more patient offensively. Like for better looks. If the paint is crowded, no need to put that ball in one of our bigs hands for everybody to collapse on them.

If we let the offense run a little bit more, they could probably get easier looks where there's maybe not two and three sets of hands digging at the ball, it's just one. And

you can play a little bit better, efficient basketball when you're just dealing with one person.

Q. We saw a huge improvement in the 3-point shooting today as opposed to last couple games. What fueled that improvement? How can you sustain it going forward?

DAWN STALEY: We got some good shooting in here. We took the shoot-around today. We practiced an hour yesterday. And we really just wanted to make sure that we can break the balls in and we can understand how that ball's coming off the rim.

I mean, we had a new smell. The gym was new. The floor was new. And our coaches do a really good job at staying routine and the type of shots that we get in the game. And we were able to do that twice over the past couple of days. And I thought it really helped us.

Q. Want to test your memory about when you played here back in the day against the Sacramento Monarchs. What do you remember about the atmosphere at that time and during your playing days?

DAWN STALEY: I mean, this was one of the arenas that really got loud. That really actually created a home court advantage to the point of, you guys had a really great team that you won a WNBA championship.

So when you can create a home court advantage, you create opportunities for you to win and win big. So I do remember it being rocking in here when I played, and that was a really long time ago.

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