

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Richmond vs UCLA

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Los Angeles, California, USA

Pauley Pavilion

UCLA Bruins

Coach Cori Close

Lauren Betts

Gabriela Jaquez

Media Conference

CORI CLOSE: Thank you all for being here. We appreciate you.

I think you get another opportunity. We're really thankful for this opportunity. I think our big focus is to be us. We have a phrase that other people try to beat us. We are questing to be us.

We didn't think we played to our identity the way we'd like to yesterday. So that's going to be our number one focus is, first, when are we at our best and can we all be counted on to execute the scout and be at our best with the things under our control, one game at a time. We're really going to recommit and focus in on that first.

Secondly, with Richmond, they are just tremendously well coached. Their ability to move without the ball, to shoot the 3, to push in transition. If they don't get something in transition, go late into clocks. They know who they are.

I think the number one key for us is going to be ball pressure and chasing them off the 3-point line. That's no secret. They're going to know that, but it's easier to say and hard to do.

But if we want to have another chance to be 1-0, we're going to have to do it and find a way to do it. And they're going to challenge us to that end.

We're excited for the challenge. I'm hoping this place is packed. And there's going to be this intensity in the air, and I love it.

So can't wait for the challenges that Richmond's going to



bring us. And I can't wait for our team to compete to be us.

Q. What do you think J.B. has added to this team that you guys really needed to kind of take this next step? Last year was a great year as well, but now to take this next step and achieve as much as you guys have.

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: J.B. is a great player. She's super talented and athletic. I think she brings great energy on the court. And we really feed off of her. And the way she rebounds and jumps so high to grab those boards and fights down there is really huge.

The level of physicality she brings is really important to our team. So it's just been great to have her on this team this year.

Q. She's been a star in her own right at Texas A&M. So to have her be selfless enough to come into this program that's already doing well and kind of star in her own role now, what's that say about her as her mentality?

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: She wanted to be on a winning team, and that's what she got here at UCLA. We were just super excited when she committed here because we knew what type of player she was.

She did great at Texas A&M. She wanted to take it to the next level in her basketball career as well. She knew she would get that here at UCLA with the skill development and playing with great players. It's been fun to see her growth and her commitment to her role on this team.

Q. Now that you guys are on break, just how does it feel to really focus all of your attention specifically on this and what's happening right now?

LAUREN BETTS: I know Gabs is super happy. We're super happy to be done with school. It's, obviously, being a student-athlete is not easy. So I think just finally being able to focus on basketball. And obviously to add to that the weather's super nice. It's just great vibes right now. We're just super happy to just be competing and just experiencing this to the fullest and not having to worry



about school. It's been great.

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: The best spring break ever.

LAUREN BETTS: Ever.

Q. You're finishing up this last game at Pauley, a second straight season where you lost one game at home. What has this meant and what does it mean to establish the home court like you guys have? And what will it mean to go out tomorrow with one more win?

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: We love playing at Pauley. Obviously playing at home is super fun, and to see the abundance of fans come in to support us has been great. And to see the growth of the fans that come in consistently to watch our games has been amazing.

I'm super thankful for everyone that comes out to watch. I was telling the team, I'm, like, last year when we played Creighton in the second round, it was probably the loudest I've ever heard Pauley to that time.

And I felt the energy with the fans yesterday. Everyone is so excited with March Madness. They're cheering even louder. So it's just been so fun. And I just love that we get to host two games.

LAUREN BETTS: I think it speaks to the talent of this team. People are excited to watch this. We're, like Gabs said, super grateful that all the fans want to come out.

Yesterday, just walking through the gym, as soon as we got to Pauley, all the fans are cheering for us. And we really appreciate that.

Q. Cori said the goal is to be yourselves, to "be us," as she said. Having said that, they do have one player on that team who is a difference maker, Atlantic 10 Player of the Year, a top perimeter player. What do you think of Maggie Doogan? And what's the key to shutting her down?

LAUREN BETTS: I think just coming out with a mentality that we're just not going to let them get what they want. Obviously they're a really talented team, great players, but I think defensively we just really have to lock in.

And we're going to prepare the best we can today. And just I think when we really put our minds to it, I think we can lock everyone up. But we just really need to show out tomorrow and focus defensively.

Q. Gabs, your brother played here. They came real

close a couple times. They fell a little bit short. They didn't get to hang the banner here in Pauley. I know we're a few weeks away from that possibility, but what would it mean to you, in the family, to be able to do that and do something that your brother didn't?

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: (Chuckling.) Just focusing one game at a time. Super proud of my brother's career here at UCLA. He did great. I loved supporting him, watching his games with him and his teammates. And to see him succeed in the NBA has also been great.

I just know that coming to UCLA, everyone's goal and everyone when they go to college is to win a national championship. So that would just also be truly amazing. But right now focusing one game at a time and preparing for the win tomorrow.

Q. Were there any finals that you're most excited to be done with class-wise?

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: All of them.

LAUREN BETTS: All of them. Oh, my gosh.

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: Yeah, all of them.

Q. Did you have any particular classes you liked this quarter?

LAUREN BETTS: I really liked my soc 180 class. Shout-out to my professor, I love her. I think, honestly, what stood out about her is she's so helpful through all the travel. She gets back. She responds right away. Shout-out to her, seriously, great professor.

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: I had a really cool professor in my soc 111 class. He was super cool. I remember coming up to him in the beginning of the year. I'm going to be traveling a lot. He was, like, good luck.

When I gave him my final, the test, he was, like, good luck, with the start of the tournament coming up. Definitely appreciate the supportive professors. But it is nice to have a spring break to just focus on basketball at this time.

Q. Lauren, I don't know if you saw, but yesterday I was watching TV and I saw the AT&T commercial you did with Kiki. Did it reach you yet?

LAUREN BETTS: I saw it.

Q. What did you think of the commercial now that it's out?



LAUREN BETTS: Honestly, I think Kiki and I did a really good job acting. I thought we killed it. Like, Oscar nominations. Exactly. I thought it was really funny. And it was a really great opportunity and me and Kiki are really grateful we did it. It was funny.

Q. You probably did that before the school's year started, obviously. But what's it been like handling that kind of stuff? You also have to play basketball. You have to take your finals. There's a lot of things going on in your lives?

LAUREN BETTS: It's just communication and scheduling and trying to make sure that, through all of it, I still find time for myself. I think that's the most important thing.

But I've been communicating a lot with Coach Cori and her assistant and just making sure we plan things so I'm not driving myself insane.

No, I'm really grateful for everyone that's been helping me through all this this year because it's been a lot at times. But we managed to find a way to balance everything out.

Q. Lauren, can you give us context with the photo with Adam Sandler?

LAUREN BETTS: Basically yesterday we went to Terrace, which is a great breakfast spot. Shout-out to Terrace.

CORI CLOSE: She wants an NIL deal?

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, I do, please.

So my family, we just love Adam Sandler. He's legit our favorite actor of all time. All his movies are our comfort movies.

When we were sitting there talking, I was actually talking about it on the way there with Coach Shannon, what if we see Adam Sandler today. We're sitting there and I see him in the corner of my eye. Siena (phonetic) is screaming.

My dad, before we even get a chance to stand up, he's already over there taking a picture with them. He was so happy. It was super goal. And obviously, like, it was a crazy experience. I can't believe I met him.

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: They invited them to the game.

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, we did. We'll see.

Q. Obviously coming to UCLA, playing basketball here, both of your goals would probably be playing in the WNBA. What would you want to do if basketball,

professional basketball isn't in the future? You guys are upperclassmen now. Gotta be thinking about the future a little bit, I'm guessing.

LAUREN BETTS: If we're not playing basketball?

CORI CLOSE: What do you want to do when the ball goes flat?

LAUREN BETTS: When the ball goes flat, I want to work with athletes one-on-one. My dream job is to be a sports therapist. That's what I want to do. I think especially at the college level, I think working with athletes one-on-one, especially having our own experiences, just being able to work with athletes and obviously having someone for athletes to talk to, having experienced it on their own, I think that's really important.

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: No modeling?

LAUREN BETTS: Well, yeah, maybe.

GABRIELA JAQUEZ: For me, I don't really know exactly what I will do right after basketball. Hopefully something in the sports realm. And maybe end up teaching along the way. I think that would be fun.

But I definitely want to work in sports but don't know what yet.

Q. I know all of the Nike teams are wearing their "Nothing Easy" shirts but you have something special on the back. Can you kind of share what that means to you guys?

CORI CLOSE: We over me. I think it's so easy to do that. One of the things we had to hold the mirror up to, when we lost to USC at home, was somehow along the way, with all of this talent, we let sort of seep in a little bit that we -- remember, we're only playing for the letters on the front of the jersey -- and trusting that when you play fully committed to only playing for what's on the front of your jersey that usually it comes back to the letters on the back of your jersey tenfold.

Charlisse Leger-Walker said it in our meeting. We're not a selfish group, but we lost track of that for just a second, and it cost us. I think it's a symbol of our commitment that we are going to choose we every time.

Every game, it may look different. I told them in film today that even against Richmond, we may play some different kind of lineups because of the challenges they are going to create for us. We just have to be committed that next woman up. And you know the phrase I use all the time is



sometimes you, sometimes me, always us.

If you want another chance to be 1-0 again then that's got to be paramount. So, we over me is the symbol of reminding ourselves what we committed to.

Q. What did you see on the film from last night's game that you mentioned earlier that you didn't really play the type of game that you would have liked to have played? What would you have liked to see from the team?

CORI CLOSE: I thought we were much too lackadaisical in executing the game plan. Coach Tony did such a good job talking about, this team is top three in the country in forcing teams into turnover situations. And they do it by making you dribble into tight spaces.

Eight of our 17 turnovers came from dribbling into tight spaces. Like, there's a lack of concentration there.

I showed a clip, okay, how are we supposed to be defending on these sideline out of bound plays. They could tell me the answer. But when I showed them the clip, we weren't executing that.

All of us, obviously we have a lot of weapons and we probably have a higher margin of error than other teams. But I even showed them a clip that was awful, but they just weren't good enough to take advantage of it. That's what it means to be us.

Like, we can't be okay with that. We ended up getting the stop, but it wasn't because we did our jobs. It wasn't because we were trustworthy to execute what we committed to each other, we were going to execute.

You know, I think we have a really good team to self-evaluate and have self-awareness and say I've got to take ownership for that, I've got to take responsibility for that. I think we'll turn it right away.

I expect to see it in our practice right now and see it executed in the game much better tomorrow. Those are a couple of examples what I mean by being trusted and depended on to be us and to do your job.

Q. Speaking to the selflessness again, I'm sure when you go through recruiting, that's a big thing you look for?

CORI CLOSE: Yes.

Q. I'm sure there's a bunch of talented players you've seen that maybe they don't fit that part.

CORI CLOSE: Agreed.

Q. How high of a bar is that in terms of what you are looking for?

CORI CLOSE: It's really high, it has to be. The more talented players we have joining our team, the riskier it becomes because there's only 200 minutes in the game. I'm looking for all the players to come into this with an abundance mentality.

What I mean by that is we are not just here to get the most minutes and to play the biggest role. We're here to have the most impactful growth experience. We're here to have a transformational experience that pays dividends long after the ball goes flat.

And there are an abundance of those opportunities. I'm not saying this is easy. What gets you is when you have a scarcity mentality because scarcity mentality says, hey, there's only 200 minutes in a game. If you get more minutes, that means there's less for me. And that's very easy to have sift through.

Why did I get taken out? What happened there? How come you have -- if you bring out the scorecards, right? So when I'm recruiting, if I hear a hint of that, we'll back off.

It has to be that you are committed to our mission. And our mission is to be an elite basketball program that teaches, mentors and equips young women for life after UCLA, to create a transformational experience for every young woman that comes here.

That isn't for everybody because it's hard. If it was easy, a whole lot more people would do it.

You mentioned Janiah earlier. And that was all of our conversations. Like, do you know what you're signing up for? What are you going to do when? How is this going to be when you're not Batman anymore? There's a whole lot of them and there's a lot of Robins. And are you willing to be a star in your role, whatever that ends up being?

And I am very impressed. Has it been easy? No. Has it been perfect? No. But her commitment to grow into that space has been remarkable. And I appreciate her awareness, her willingness to grow in ownership and her willingness to put winning above her -- winning and development and growth above individual accolades and spotlight.

Q. What impresses you about Maggie Duggan? And does she compare to anybody you've faced in the Big



Ten?

CORI CLOSE: Hobbs maybe at Michigan comes to mind. I hadn't thought about it as much. But very impressed with her. Her quickness of release in her shot, you can tell her basketball IQ is high. I cracked up at her mom watching from way up high. Mom was -- kudos to her; obviously a great coach but a great player in her own right at LaSalle.

I think that system really puts her in a great position to showcase her versatility. Her ability, I looked at, 8 seconds left, they have the ball on the side, you know they're going to her. How the creativity of her to be able to create scoring catches in different ways, attack off the bounce, shoot the 3, second cut. Her movement without the ball is remarkable, which puts her in great positions to have really efficient scoring catches.

They are the most effective-field-goal percentage team in the country, 100th percentile in the analytics report we got today. And part of that is her decision-making and her ability to not only be a great versatile scorer, but also to make her teammates better in the process as well.

Q. It's pretty well known you were a big fan of Coach Wooden.

CORI CLOSE: Yeah, he changed my life.

Q. What's your favorite lesson from Coach that you've tried to instill in the team?

CORI CLOSE: I think my favorite lesson is different depending on what season of leadership I'm in, in terms of that. But honestly I wrote this in my prayer journal this morning. May I define success the way Coach Wooden taught me, even in the midst of this March Madness run.

And I think that isn't making us less competitive, it makes us more competitive. But may I always remember that he had taught me that I'm not coaching people's jump shots, I'm coaching people's hearts. He always said, too, if you coach their hearts really well, usually their jump shots end up pretty good too.

But he always cared more about impacting their lives than impacting wins. And the great news is, when you really do that selflessly and consistently and you have a high attention to detail, it ends up impacting winning too.

But honestly, literally my prayer this morning was that I would be somebody that stayed mission-minded and maintained perspective even with the most stakes and the highest pressure, just like he taught me. And funny, he won 10 national championships in 12 years, so it obviously

works.

Q. This is the first time that women's basketball tournament gets units.

CORI CLOSE: Right.

Q. I know this is something that's been very long overdue for you in this sport, but now that it's finally here, what's the takeaway from it?

CORI CLOSE: I was the one Division I coach actually that met with the Kaplan law firm every week during that process. I learned a lot. I was very ignorant until that point.

And realizing that we don't desire to slice the pie differently and take any resources away from anybody else. I am the biggest men's basketball fan, March Madness-wise, you're going to find. But it should be that we have equal opportunity to be an asset, to grow the pie, to influence corporate sponsorship at levels that our eyeballs have gone up, our engagement has gone up, all those things. And unit distribution is a really important thing because, just think about all the pressures on universities right now, I mean, with rev share, with cost of attendance, with all these things that have come in the last eight to 10 years, I mean I cannot imagine being the president of a university or an athletic director, it's really challenging times.

When you have men's basketball and women's basketball, and men's basketball gets units for their performance and that comes back to you for investing in them, and women get nothing, even though the media rights deals are going up, even though the eyeballs are going up, even though attendance is going up, with all this pressure, where do you think they're going to continue to invest? Men's basketball.

This was a really important shift, and we're just the beginning, that we're saying, no, we want to be an asset. So we want you to be encouraged to invest in our asset that is going to bring a return and unit distribution is one of the ways that can bring a return on investment, as well as the media rights, as well as attendance, as well as corporate sponsorship, but this is an important piece because you're saying, okay, we're at a new point in our system and they now have the opportunity to be a new revenue stream. That's an important piece if we want our sport to continue to grow.

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