

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

Sunday, March 23, 2025

Los Angeles, California, USA

Pauley Pavilion

**UCLA Bruins**

**Cori Close**

**Lauren Betts**

**Kiki Rice**

Media Conference

UCLA 84, Richmond 67

**CORI CLOSE:** I really want to thank the coaching staff of Richmond. I'm not sure, No. 1, I'm not sure I could respect how they play any more. I knew this was going to be a really tough game, and this really challenges how we like to play, and they spread you out and they shoot it so well, and they are very selfless. I just think they are a great team.

But I also have to say, today, there's nothing like having comrades in this business that you have alignment of purpose, and I may have had one of my most encouraging conversations with their head coach this morning.

I just want to give so much credit to him. He gave to me; he filled my cup today, and at the same time, he was such an awesome competitor. You know, you Richmond folks, you got a special one.

So just lots of credit to them. And boy, are they a good team. They really stretched us, like I said.

But really proud of our defensive response. We had too many mistakes of how we were guarding certain things in the first half, and they were hot. And that combination was tough for us.

But loved our response on defense in that third quarter. I just thought the intensity was so much better. We made some slight adjustments on about three different actions out of halftime, and they adjusted to all of them.

And I just loved the crowd, how they got behind that



intensity. And I thought that was a really big deal. We needed that energy, and for them to get so excited about how we were defending, made all the difference in the world. Really proud of two things from our team: Our selflessness and our commitment to our defense. Those two things, I thought, carried us, and that's the kind of thing you need.

It's going to be somebody different all the time. And obviously their statistical lines were ridiculous. But in our locker room, we called out people like Kendall, who had assists and rebounds and was so efficient in a spark in 12 minutes of play.

Elina, for how she came in and gave Londynn some breather and moved her feet on the defensive end and kept up the pressure.

Janiah, four assists, zero turnovers, eight rebounds. Like, it's all those other people.

We have two big dogs up here, and they do so much for us. But they know that it's our team that matters, and the selflessness and work ethic that goes along with it.

**Q. What did the crowd feel like and sound like to you, especially in that third quarter after Londynn hit that three, it seems like the roof was about to come off.**

**KIKI RICE:** That was definitely one of my favorite crowds I've played in front of. Their energy and how they carried us, especially in the third quarter, to bring us that extra boost we really appreciated that.

Given that it's spring break right now, there's not a ton of students on campus. It means so much for us for so many people to show up. And obviously in L.A., there's so many other things to do. It's a beautiful weekend, but people were here in the gym watching us. That was really fun.

**Q. At the end of the third quarter, I thought you were going to knock over Kendall with how excited you were when you went over her. What were you feeling in that moment after what you had done those previous ten minutes?**



LAUREN BETTS: I'm so proud of Kendall. I love her so much. She's one of the most positive people you'll ever meet, and being a freshman on this team is not easy. But she just continues to work and just do what she needs to do to help the team.

In that moment, I just felt so proud of her because how hard it is throughout the season, she just continues to contribute anyway that she can. I'm just really thankful that she's on this team.

**Q. The other day we talked about defense. You talked also about taking care of the basketball, and also you mentioned that everybody contributes. What was it like to see that tonight? All those things you talk about came to fruition tonight.**

LAUREN BETTS: I'm just super proud of my teammates. I thought, you know, that second half we really turned it around. I think we just changed our mentality defensively. We wanted to get stops, and you know we overcommunicated and we had each other's back and we played as a unit, and that's what's most important.

I think everybody individually just stepped up and did what they need to do. I think if they just continue to do that we're going to be in a really good position. But I'm just really proud of everybody today.

**Q. Michael Thompson, a famous Laker and broadcaster, Tweeted that the Top 3 UCLA centers are No. 1, Kareem; No. 2, Bill Walton; and No. 3 Lauren Betts. What are your initial thoughts on that?**

LAUREN BETTS: That's crazy. I don't really have any other words. That's just crazy. Thank you. Wow (laughter) my goodness.

**Q. What was the team's mindset going into that third quarter?**

KIKI RICE: I think a lot of us, we've been in this really similar position last year with Creighton. I think we were down at halftime last year. So kind of something we're used to.

I think coming out there and playing our game and making the adjustments we needed to offensively and defensively. But our belief and our motivation never wavered, which is something I'm really proud of this group. We're really positive in the locker room and continue to build each other up, tell each other what we needed from each other, and it worked.

**Q. You came out in the third quarter hitting a whole bunch of threes. I think you had four. What was your mindset about being more aggressive from the three-point line?**

KIKI RICE: I think just taking the shots on the open. I get a lot of catch-and-shoot threes because a lot of teams send a lot of bodies to Lauren and our posts and everything. Being ready to take those and knock them down and shoot with confidence, I work on that a lot. So just got to continue to show it.

**Q. It's nice to be comfortable in a game but these couple of games where you've been pushed so far in the tournament, how valuable is that for what the next four games will be?**

LAUREN BETTS: Like you said, we're basically going to need it moving forward. Grit, especially in March Madness, is super important. I think just like the overcommunication, making sure we hold each other accountable in time-outs is going to be super important moving forward.

I think these past two games, like Coach Cori has held us accountable, and she's not changing the standard. So if you're not doing what you need to do, you're going to come out. I think that's just that's going to push us individually so when we are on the floor, we do what we need to do to win.

**Q. You guys had five turnovers as an entire team today in the entire game. What allowed you to take care of the ball so well tonight?**

CORI CLOSE: 25 assists.

KIKI RICE: That was something we were very proud of in the locker room. I think just our focus on that this week in preparation and in practice, taking care of the ball. We haven't been happy with the amount of turnovers we've had in the past few games. As guards, that's on us to really find the right people and put everyone in good positions.

We watched film on that yesterday, and we saw us turning the ball over. We didn't want that again, and so I was happy with how everyone made smart decisions and took care of the ball.

**Q. Kiki had 23 points, seven assists, only one turnover. How easy does it make it for you and the rest of the team when Kiki is on that level, dominant, running the offense, and knowing when to push it and pull things back?**

LAUREN BETTS: I'm just super thankful Kiki is my teammate and I don't have to play against her. I call her the "Point God." She's really like that girl. I just trust her so much and know that she's going to make the right decision at the end of the day.

And I'm just so proud of her because she continues to work her butt off every single day, and that's just who she is and what she brings to this team.

Tonight, honestly, like other than the assists and non-turnovers, I'm just proud she was confident in her shot today. I just thought that was super cool to see, especially on the kick-outs. I'm just like, yes, Kiki, shoot every single time.

I'm just super grateful that I get to be her teammate, and I just know moving forward, we're going to continue to do great things.

**Q. You actually had nine offensive rebounds, which outnumbered the offensive rebounds that the entire Richmond team had. You guys as a team had 27 second-chance points. How big was the offensive rebounding tonight for you guys?**

LAUREN BETTS: I think it's super important. It started with taking good shots. I think offensively, when we force really tough shots, that's when we don't get in the right position to create those offensive rebounds. So I think tonight, we just made the right decision with the ball, and I'm there to just basically clean up the mess whenever I need to. Offensively I think that kind of ignited my rebounding today.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about that Michael Thompson Tweet and sort of just what it's like to be out there playing with an all-timer here at UCLA?**

KIKI RICE: Makes life easy. I think as a point guard, knowing that I can throw the ball up to Lauren, I think one of the best things about her is her hands and how she catches every pass. I threw her a lob one time, wasn't a great pass, but she caught the ball. Probably would have had another turnover if she didn't have the amazing hands that she does.

Lauren makes the game easy for everyone, and for everyone on this team and her ability to shoulder so much weight and just do that on a consistent basis and show up for us every single day, is something we really admire. Just love playing with her, and you know, she's only getting better.

**Q. When Kiki is shooting like that, how much does**

**that change what you guys can do on offense, and how have you seen her comfort grow shooting that specific shot?**

CORI CLOSE: Well, it's interesting. The numbers, we chart, every single one of those in practice every day and her numbers are ridiculous. It just has to do with that she's got to believe it and think, "I'm a shooter."

So when that ball gets kicked out, it's really a mental thing. It's not just a shooting thing. She's been shooting like that throughout the off-season. She worked on it throughout every practice and several times we brought her in and said, "Look when you catch-and-shoot first, your numbers are so good. You've got to do it more." And she actually gets taken out if she doesn't shoot it.

So you know, it's not surprising to us. She's just showing it more. We always say the works done in the dark gets revealed in the light, and I'd say the light was pretty bright on her shot tonight.

**Q. Maggie had a hot hand, especially in the first half.**

CORI CLOSE: So good.

**Q. Just to contain her to two points in the third. What adjustments were made in the locker room at the half to contain her?**

CORI CLOSE: Well, all of her threes, you know, she would try to drive on Lauren. Lauren would cut her off, and then she would retreat dribble and Lauren wasn't taking up the slack. At halftime, I told Lauren, we tried to get her on 25 more, but we knew with all of their screens that she was going to get on her eventually.

I just told her, "You're not the National Defensive Player of the Year candidate for just in the post. You are really good on the perimeter. When she retreats, you go with her." And just really talking about taking up the slack. I'm just like, "She can't get buy you to the rim. You will guard her. But nobody can help you if you don't get out to the three." Just really challenged her to play perimeter defense that way.

But I also thought our other four players, I thought Janiah did a really good job. I thought she came in. I thought Timea; our ability to rotate big threes, fours, in Timea Gardner and Angela Dugalic and Janiah Barker, I thought that was a really important piece, too. Because we could just throw bodies at her over and over again with length over time.

But she is a really good player, and she definitely caused



us to make some adjustments at halftime.

**Q. Back to the Sweet 16, third year in a row, seventh in nine years. What does it mean to you and this program to be able to accomplish that?**

CORI CLOSE: Well, I think it's one thing to get to certain points of elite excellence. And I think being Sweet 16 and higher, it's really how you're judged if you want to be an elite basketball program.

I think it's sustained excellence, and I think we're making steps of that. That's just an expectation. We're going to have habits that lead us to those places, and now we've got to push the envelope, though I'm only thinking 1-0, so I won't talk about past that.

But I think I'm most proud of a staff that always holds the standard. I'm most proud of young women who don't want to just be pushed to be in an elite basketball program, but they want to be elite people, and they want to use this to be championship-level women.

You know, so I think it's a part of our program. It's not the only part of our program. But you know, we're pretty driven to be an elite basketball team, so to have that sustained excellence is a good step in the right direction.

**Q. How big were the points off of turnovers tonight?**

CORI CLOSE: Well, I think it all contributed, right. You're talking about the offensive rebounding contributed.

But I think causing those turnovers; us not turning it over. You know, we've been telling our team, our percentages when we get quality shots are elite. And so, really, the missing link was just taking care of the ball.

But when you turn them over, it makes that shot selection even easier, and we're able to attack in transition. We're able to attack before they are able to establish their help side defense or their double-team rotations, their zone, and the way that they played a lot in the second half.

So it's huge. But it all fits together. It's all a possessions game, right. So if we don't turn it over, we control rebounds, we get extra possessions by getting out-of-area rebounds, it all fits in. And if we are able to get more shots, quality shots than our opponents, we're going to have a pretty good chance to win.

**Q. You called a time-out when you were up 17 and looks like they scored back-to-back.**

CORI CLOSE: Back-to-back threes. That's the key factor.

**Q. So with that, what was your concern going into the game, and was that part of the reason why you called a time-out?**

CORI CLOSE: No. 1 key on the scouting report was pressuring the ball and running them off the three-point line. We didn't think that if they had to shoot hard twos, most of the night, that they were going to have enough to beat us.

But if they are able to get threes and we're trading with twos, that was not a good recipe for us. So when they scored those back-to-back threes, we needed to address that right away. And credit to them. They outscored us in the fourth quarter. We gave up 24 points.

And so you know, as great as a lot of things were, we got to continue to push the envelope of not giving away those possessions or have those mental breakdowns where you're not doing your job, and that's really the bottom line is execute the scouting report and do your job.

**Q. You've had to say, not had to, but you've said a lot of praise for Lauren over the course of the season, understandably. But what can you say about a performance like the one she had tonight in a game like this one?**

CORI CLOSE: Well, I mean, Lauren -- I mean, heck, we've already said she's the third best center, male or female, in UCLA history.

She's an absolute generational player. She is not 6'7 just a low-post player. I mean, watch her move out there. The way that she guarded and switched, and even when she made some mistakes, the way that she chased people at 6'7 -- and she's really 6'82 by the way.

But she's just an elite player. She has basketball IQ. She's incredibly competitive. She affects the game in so many ways on offense and defense. The list goes on and on. I mean, the scouting report sort of starts with Lauren every time, and so it's a really almost impossible task. Our other players are the beneficiary of the attention that she draws every single night.

But I have to say, I might be more proud of her courage to share her story. You know, several articles that have come out in the last few weeks about who she is as a young woman, is that the biggest difference you're seeing in her performance out there is that she doesn't only see herself as a basketball player anymore; and she talks a lot about being a daughter and a sister and her interests outside of basketball.

Because of that, because her identity is not only as a basketball player anymore, she's actually freed up to master her craft at a different level. But that took courage to share her story, and I'm as proud of that as I am her performance on the hardwood tonight.

**Q. How much Ole Miss have you had the opportunity to watch this season, and how quick does your focus have to shift?**

CORI CLOSE: It has to shift immediately. But we're planning ahead all the time. We have actually watched Ole Miss a lot because Christeen Iwuala is on her team and we love her. She used to be a brunette but we are Iwualy fans, as we call her, and we just think she's spectacular. So we've tuned in as a team to a lot of games, starting with in Paris at the very beginning of the year.

So I've watched, actually, them a lot. I mean, they are one of the best defensive teams in the country. They are extremely physical. You know, it's going to be a grind-it-out kind of game. We have a lot of respect for how they defend.

In fact, our staff meetings all the time, Coach Brown will say, Well, if we were Ole Miss we would be defending like this, this and this; if I had a dollar for every time she said that.

We are going to have to get our act together for the Sweet 16 game. But we've been preparing all the way. We've charted this out of what this looks like. So we'll be ready. But you know, Coach Yo has done a great job with her team, and we absolutely cheer for Iwualy every game leading up to this, except for on Friday.

**Q. Janiah had limited minutes in the second quarter. Looked like she might have been in pain at some point. Do you have a health update?**

CORI CLOSE: She's fine. She was overheating. That's the official word. She just said, let's give her a second, get to halftime and she'll be fine. Nothing serious. So she's good.

Huge, you guys. Keep following this game and just a big piece, my mother who is standing over here said, we were looking at the paper and all of social media and all the things, and women's basketball was dominating the media space today. I, to you, say thank you for that.

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