

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - California Baptist vs UCLA

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Los Angeles, California, USA

Pauley Pavilion

UCLA Bruins

Cori Clsoe

Lauren Betts

Angela Dugalic

Media Conference

UCLA 96, California Baptist 43.

CORI CLOSE: Thank you all for being here tonight. Really appreciate your coverage. It makes a difference. I want to compliment Cal Baptist. Their sustained excellence and how they play to their identity, have sort of a relentless hustle about them, knowing who they are, just want to give them credit. They had a great season. They are very well-coached.

Obviously those kind of matchups are difficult for us, as big as we are, we couldn't take advantage of it as much in the first half on offense, and then defensively it really spreads us out. But want to give them credit. They shoot the ball extremely well. They got off 30 threes when that was the No. 1 thing on our scout. That's not a rip on, necessarily, us, but I want to compliment them. They have proven to be a really good basketball team over time.

And I believe in our team. I love this team. This has been one of the most fun teams I've ever coached, and it's been one of the most hard-working teams I've ever coaches. And every game presents some different learning points and challenges. And I've really got great confidence in this team that we will look at this game and go, okay, you know, what did this teach us, what are the pivots and adjustments that need to be made, and we will come out ready to go on Monday.

Q. Coming into the second half, did you feel like there was an energy shift that just led to, especially, the shooting differences compared to the first half?

ANGELA DUGALIC: Yeah, I think in the locker room, it



was made very clear to us that we needed to do a better job, and that was before the coaches came in. We took accountability of what we needed to fix, which was a lot of things, honestly. Like Cori said, Cal Baptist is a great team and a great shooting team, and we didn't execute our scouting report to our best potential.

I think in the second half, though, we did a better job because we were all on the same page and we understood what we had to do.

Q. Despite the lull in the first half, you also dominated the boards. You pulled down 62 total rebounds.

LAUREN BETTS: Dang, yeah, I don't know, I feel like that's something we emphasized all week in practice that we need to be amazing rebounders if we want to get through this tournament. I think that's just all the hard work we did in practice that translates to the game today.

I think when they really focus on our posts, especially boxing us out and our guards coming in crashing that makes a big difference for us. I'm really proud of how our guards rebounded today. I thought that was really good.

Q. You and Sienna both had double-doubles tonight. How cool is it to share that moment with your sister?

LAUREN BETTS: I'm really happy for her. She had a moment today in the game where she literally kept missing and getting her own rebound and missing and getting her own rebound and I'm like, Sienna, just make the shot (laughter) and she's laughing; she's not serious.

I'm really happy for her. Yeah, really proud of her growth and how she came out today. Honestly, besides her scoring, I thought over defense was a lot better today, and I know that's something she wanted to get better in, especially playing a really good team like CBU, they move the ball really well and their guards get to the rim. She was just really proud of her slides. Like she didn't say anything about her points. She was like, I'm so glad that I can guard them; I worked so hard on that. Really happy for her.

Q. There was a moment in the third quarter where you



hit a wide open three and to push the lead to 20 and the crowd went crazy. Just what was going through your mind right then?

CORI CLOSE: I just wanted to stop. I wanted a deflection. I don't know, I think our team emphasizes defense a lot, and I really try to do my best in that part and what I can bring to the table in that aspect.

So when we change our defense to that full-court press, in my head, I was like, "I need a deflection, I need a deflection, I need a deflection; and luckily, I think I got one or two deflections which led to the three and one deflection which led to, I think, Char or Gabs getting the steal.

If I can consistently do that, then I feel like we can consistently dominate. So I just have to, again, do that consistently.

Q. When you guys get switched out on the guards on the perimeter, are you nervous, or do you feel like you're going to win the matchup?

LAUREN BETTS: I'm not nervous because if you saw who we go against every day in practice, it's really nothing when you're out there. I mean, our scout guys, they do not take it easy on us and every time we go blitz in practice, I get my mind right, like I've got to keep them in front, and that's something that I've worked really hard on.

I think all forwards, we have done a really good job of working through that, and I'm proud of the way we move. You don't see a lot of posts who are able to do that. That's just really, really special.

ANGELA DUGALIC: I think it speaks to our versatility and the fact that we are able to guard one through five, that's an amazing trade. It definitely helps the team.

Yeah, I love switching out. Any time Cori says that, I'm like, great, perfect. Makes it simple for me.

Q. Cori mentioned, and you said at halftime, you knew what you had to take care of, but what lessons are there to be learned from this game?

ANGELA DUGALIC: I think we also mentioned this after the game, as well, not having those slow starts. We've had a few instances of that throughout the year and just in our past, and we're not trying to stay in the past but we have to learn from our mistakes, and that is something that we just need to overemphasize and overexaggerate, those warmups, that first start of the game, even going into the second half as well.

Just like -- because going into the game, you're a little bit nervous, obviously, and we have 25 minutes on the shot clock to stretch, shoot, all this different stuff.

We all understand that and acknowledge that. But at the same time, we know we have to do a better job of it.

Q. Who was making things clear in the locker room before the coaches came along?

ANGELA DUGALIC: All my teammates, from seniors to Amanda even said something, Sienna. I think that's what I take pride in the most is that we're able to listen to each other, no matter your age, your position, whatever it is. Like we do understand that there are people who have more experience but that also doesn't negate what you have to say. Yeah.

Q. Are y'all wearing identical manicures?

ANGELA DUGALIC: Take a photo.

LAUREN BETTS: I went for the UCLA yellow vibes. I know Kiki has blue and gold going on.

ANGELA DUGALIC: I had yellow, but then I was like, I need a fresh set (laughter).

Q. What do you think goes into what causes those slow starts? Was it just nerves? What goes into why you think slow starts keep happening?

ANGELA DUGALIC: It could be a mix of things. Just depends on the day for some people, and sometimes it's just like, you know what, my stomach is hurting today, so I don't even know.

But it's just like literally -- I know. I know it sounds dumb. But there can be different reasons. I don't think it's a consistent thing. Sometimes it is. Sometimes it isn't. Yeah.

CORI CLOSE: Let me frame this a little bit. That has not been our thing has been slow starts. We've usually started really well. We had a slow start versus Washington but outside of that our first quarters have been one of our best quarters throughout the year.

So that actually hasn't been a trend of ours. It actually has been taking a breath when it comes around to the second quarter. For framing of that, that has not been our Achilles' heel, and I don't want to get that into their heads that that's been something that's actually been an issue.

Q. What did you tell your players at halftime?



CORI CLOSE: It was spirited. It was spirited. You know, I mean, it's just -- it was unacceptable. It's not the fact that we missed shots. Those are not the things that get me really fired up. It's when we don't execute the scouting report; when we are lackadaisical; when we don't communicate; when we are not connected. Those are the controllable things. We made a commitment to each other that we would deliver on; that we could be dependable to do our job, and we let each other down that first half about that.

That being said, I trust this team. They understand the assignment, and they will adjust. They will respond, and we will be better for it.

Q. There was a moment in the second half with you addressed Gianna on the end of the bench and moved her to the beginning of the bench. Can you tell us about that conversations?

CORI CLOSE: I think Gianna is a brilliant playmaker on both sides of ball and that's the standard I believe in her for. I was like, this is what I need from you.

I trust her. She isn't going to do it the same way maybe a Kiki will do it or someone else. But her IQ is so high. Her competitive nature is so good. And when she's below the bar of what I know she's capable of, I love her enough to hold her to it. I was making it really clear of what I knew was in her and what I expected her to change.

And she's a phenomenal kid. A great player. I was just trying to get to that competitive spirit that I know is in her.

Q. Going back to the discussion at halftime, the players said that they kind of talked amongst their selves before you got in there.

CORI CLOSE: Yeah.

Q. How much weight does that take off your shoulders knowing that you have players that take accountability like that?

CORI CLOSE: Yeah, I trust them. I don't know everything that was said before the coaches came in. But I really do trust that they took care of things before I ever took care of things.

This is not a situation where the coaches want it more than the kids. That's not the situation here.

So I don't really have any doubt that they had already taken accountability, already been solution-minded, and it

came from them first. I made sure that they knew I was disappointed, too.

Q. The scoring in the second half, 52-9, talk about that a little bit, please.

CORI CLOSE: Well, I think what I talked to them about is they let things -- Coach Wooden says, if you let things that are out of your control -- if you focus on things that are out of your control it will adversely affect things that are in your control.

And what we did in the first, you know, is we were sort of out of our rhythm, and we had to adjust and we weren't in our normal routine. The game, you have to sort of guess how long we think the fourth quarter is going to go, and we mis-guessed and so they were rushed. I think what happened was we let things out of our control, the warmup time, when we go out there, affect things that were under our control.

We just had to regroup and go, okay, we know how to do this. Refocus. We talk a lot about getting back to neutral. Neutral is that place where you go, okay, what's required of me next, what's my next right step. We needed to refocus, recommit and get to that point.

But obviously night and day difference between the two halves. You know, we just really challenged them in process-oriented ways. We had four or five categories that we were really focused on ask we kept going back to those; let's get another one. We ended up with, I want to say, maybe 15 kills, and kills are three stops in a row. So they almost all happened in the second half. I think we had 12 kills in the second half, and we had only three in the first half.

So I just think it was a matter of, you know, there's a lot of things in these tournaments that are not going to be comfortable and perfect, and you've got to be able to pivot and adjust. And I asked them: Who recognized that we weren't like on it, you know, and how can you recognize that state change quicker and then go, hey, this is how we've got to refocus, we can take responsibility for this.

You know, that's what's having a growth mindset is all about.

Q. Obviously playing in the Big Ten, you're used to playing against good teams.

CORI CLOSE: Yeah.

Q. For Cal Baptist, for them to come in, in their start, to be so scrappy and physical, what is mental



adjustment for the team to make in response to something like that?

CORI CLOSE: You know, we are one of the longest teams, tallest teams in the country. And you know, those are hardest matchups. You know, last year, it was Richmond. That style of play is really tough for us. You're asking our bigs to chase around those people, and it's that balance.

But pretty much, you know, you look at the men's tournament, you look at the women's tournament, like you have to be able to adjust to styles of play that you don't face in your conference as much. You can see that a lot with the power four teams. Really relying on the three-point shot which is the great equalizer. You have to adjust that you may have to play screening angles differently than maybe you played against Big Ten teams.

And I think that's part of it from Creighton to Richmond to now Cal Baptist, you know, that's part of the deal. You know, I'm thankful that the reality for us is we get to coach them another day and we accomplished the mission of going 1-0. So we get a chance to learn and grow and give to each other and get a little bit better tomorrow.

Q. Tell me about the offensive rebounds leading to 30 second-chance points, how helpful was that?

CORI CLOSE: You know who I'm most proud -- not most, that's always dangerous when I say that.

I'm proud of Angela Dugalic for that. We needed her to be on the offensive glass. In the first couple of possessions, she didn't. I subbed her pretty quick after she went in because of that but that's a big part of her role, it's like the very first thing that we need from her.

I thought she really responded and I'm really proud of how she's really taken account ability and pride in improving in that area. Like Lauren said, even though it really was, I was teasing her because she kept talking about our guards, and I was like, Sienna Betts 12 rebounds, Angela an had 11 and then Lauren had 10. So I was like, I don't know if it was really the guards.

But I do agree with her that having Kiki Rice have 7 rebounds, I think that's a big deal. Gabriela Jaquez had 5 rebounds. Amanda came in and had 4 rebounds. I just think it has to be a collective commitment to rebounding.

And I think everybody -- I think this tournament, if you were to look to two stats that determine things, it would be turnovers and rebounds. And those are situations that are so critical, the amount of possessions that you can create

for your team to ride the ebbs and flows of the game.

Proud of how that really carried us, especially in the second half.

Q. Kiki got to the line five times and made all ten of her free throws. So she was really aggressive, looking for drives to the basket and such. Was that aggressiveness something you guys talked about?

CORI CLOSE: I think that's what she's been doing all year, one of the things I'm really proud of her about. Kiki is such a perfectionist, and I just want her to feel free to go for it. And she's been doing that all year long.

But I do think that's a need we have is to get to the free throw line more often. We should, for as good as we are in the paint and efficient, I think we can draw more fouls, too, and be more efficient through those. For over the course of the season, we're pretty good free throw shooting team.

We've had a couple of lapses in that but overall we've been pretty good. You know, bottom line for me is that that's a huge piece when you have a guard who can get downhill, really force pace, and get those easy ones, and she is so reliable at the free throw line.

What I love is the higher the stakes, the tougher the moment; the more reliable she is. And so I think that's a huge piece. If we can get trips to the cherry stripe and Kiki can lead us that way, it's great. But I think it also speaks to her mentality that she's playing more free, playing more physical, and I just want her to keep that aggression level up.

Q. I wanted to ask you about the sisters and the matching double-doubles. How big of a deal is that for Sienna?

CORI CLOSE: I don't think if it's really a big deal. It's this weird thing, on the one hand, I want them to enjoy this connection they have. I want them to enjoy this year. They will look back on this year and just really treasure it.

Simultaneously, I want to especially treat Sienna on her own journey, and to not make her feel like she's in the shadows of anything that Lauren is doing, and that's sort of a fine line to sort of, I call it, the healthy tension I'm trying to find with them. Because I think both things can be true at the same time.

And I love the moments you catch when they have a connection and an eye contact or a smile that is different than everybody else because they are sharing it as sisters and I just think how special is that. That's so wonderful.

And I want Sienna to feel like she's Sienna. She's not Lauren's sister. She can enjoy that but for our team, she's Sienna Betts, and I have an expectation of her growth and her journey, and she's doing a great job on that, and I can't wait to see her grow through her own journey.

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