

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

Sunday, March 22, 2026

Los Angeles, California, USA

Pauley Pavilion

## Oklahoma State Cowgirls

### Coach Jacie Hoyt

### Achol Akot

### Stailee Heard

### Haleigh Timmer

#### Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by student-athletes Achol Akot, Stailee Heard, and Haleigh Timmer from Oklahoma State.

**Q. Timmy, Jacie mentioned she brought you in for postseason experience. Yesterday you were able to deliver a win. How does it feel leaving a lasting impact here in just one year at OSU?**

HALEIGH TIMMER: Yeah, obviously it's my last year, but I feel like I've gained a lot of successes and have been really fortunate to be on a lot of successful teams. So I think nothing really changes this year. Just want to play as long as possible and super excited for the opportunity to play again tomorrow.

**Q. For all three of you, I think last I looked y'all are like 27-point underdogs tomorrow. Is that extra fuel?**

HALEIGH TIMMER: Definitely.

STAILEE HEARD: I did not know that, but that definitely adds fuel to the fire.

HALEIGH TIMMER: I think we believe in ourselves more than anyone else. I think that's really all we need. Honestly, like Coach was talking about it, but we wouldn't be surprised if we won.

Just going in with that mindset just to attack the game and just believing in ourselves even if nobody else does.



**Q. A2, you've gone up against Beers at OU, Crooks at Iowa State, and now Betts here at UCLA. How does that experience against those two bigs help you for tomorrow?**

ACHOL AKOT: I think I've always been on teams with tall players. So I've been having that experience. I just think now is the time to put it to use. All the lessons I've learned against Audi and Beers, now is the time to use that, and I think I've learned a lot coming here.

**Q. I'm just curious, we've heard so much from coaches and players about taking everything one game at a time. Can you talk a little bit about the mindset shift that has to happen between a first round game and a second round game in March?**

STAILEE HEARD: Honestly, I said this yesterday that we have to take one game at a time. Now today we're talking about UCLA, and that's all we're worried about. We're not worried about any other game past this. We're worried about getting the job done here.

I feel like this is my first -- personally this is my first time going to the second round, and it's honestly very exciting. We can't let this excitement get to us, and we just have to stay locked in and stay focused on the game plan and executing, and just being us like we have all season long.

ACHOL AKOT: I think for the first game, the beginning, the start of the game is the most important thing. I think the second game, like with a good team like UCLA, it's 40 minutes. The whole entire game we have to be at our best and be connected and just listen in and execute.

Now we're just putting everything together and playing a full game of good basketball.

**Q. Timmy, last year you played UConn in the second round, and they ended up winning the National Championship. UCLA is kind of the same type of team as UConn, who they have good odds to win this year. How do you use that experience from last year to help you this year?**



HALEIGH TIMMER: Every team you play in the tournament is going to be firing on all cylinders and being elite. So just coming in knowing that nothing is going to come easy. Kind of what A2 -- A2, we call her -- just talked about. We have to play 40 minutes. We can't waste possessions on offense or defense. I think it's really just going to come down to possessions. So just making the most of every possession.

**Q. Timmy, you've missed a season due to injury. How have you been able to help Macey get through this year?**

HALEIGH TIMMER: It definitely changes your perspective and gives you a fresh outlook on the game. I think you can grow a lot coming back and become a better player.

So just encouraging her through that and helping her to see that coming back you are almost better because you got to see the game from the outside looking in. Your body's fresh and all of that. So, yeah, just encouraging her in that way.

**Q. Timmy and Stailee, what has Achol meant for your team this year, giving you post presence on both sides of the floor?**

STAILEE HEARD: Honestly, she's been -- I've played with a lot of big post players. A2 is a really, really good solid -- most people would say she's an undersized 5. She's just mobile. She's active. She's one of the best finishers I play with. She has good hands. I feel like she's just been a really good presence for us on the court, on and off the court honestly.

HALEIGH TIMMER: I would just say she's a really smart player. She's just very in control. She makes good reads. Honestly, like I have so much confidence every time she has the ball that she's either going to go up and finish it or kick it out. She's just a really smart player.

It's so much fun to play with people like that because you can just trust them and you know they have your back. Even on defense, she'll -- us guards will lose our person, and she'll cover that up. You might not see it on the stat sheet, but she does so much for our team. She just fills in the gaps.

ACHOL AKOT: Thanks, guys.

**Q. Achol, two of them went through the NCAA Tournament last year. What's this week been like for you, kind of going through your first postseason play?**

ACHOL AKOT: I think it's exciting. Last year -- I mean, my

first two years, we never made it to the tournament. So I think that feeling of not playing right now is just -- I just have it all bottled up inside me. Like I'm just excited to play and to be able to keep playing.

Whatever my team needs, that's what I'm going to do.

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by head coach Jacie Hoyt from Oklahoma State.

JACIE HOYT: Well, it's just a huge blessing to get to be one of the few teams that still gets to play this time of the year. We are thrilled about that, very, very excited to face a team that I've been able to watch all season long and just have so much respect for.

Cori Close is a coach that probably doesn't realize the impact that she's had on me as a head coach. I have so much respect for her and the way that she goes about things. So this is kind of a surreal opportunity for me to get to be up against a head coach that I have so much respect for.

Like you said, just very, very fortunate to be playing right now, very excited. I feel like we've been playing our best basketball, and I've been saying that the last month. Just excited to see how that's going to equate to tomorrow.

I have to give a special shout out to Cayden Cox in the room, who came all the way from Stillwater to be here. I think that one of the cool things about being a part of Oklahoma State is just the loyal and true. That's our fan base that we hang our hat on. Cayden, you're a huge part of that. So I just want to thank you for making the trip and being here.

**Q. When you start looking at UCLA -- I mean, I assume a lot of things stand out to you, but what is it that really stands out to you about them?**

JACIE HOYT: They're a bunch of pros. There's a level of composure and poise that they play with. Obviously they're great basketball players, but I think that a separator for them is their intangibles. They just have this, like I said, a poise about them. The moment never seems too big. They never really seem to get rattled.

It's a team that everyone looks like they understand their role, and they're very two feet in for what their role is, and they shine in their role. Obviously you get to this time of year, there's no weaknesses in teams. There's weaknesses, but minor ones. I think that they're a team that, of all the teams still playing, have fewer than most.

Obviously have a great outside game, great inside game.

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Defensively I think they're really good. Everyone talks about their offense, but defensively I think they present a lot of challenges to teams.

Just overall their depth, their balance, and their composure is something that I think separates them.

**Q. Two of the top ten offensive teams in efficiency, on paper you guys might not have an offensive advantage. You've had an advantage for most of your games this season. How do you create an advantage for yourself when on paper it might not look like you have one?**

JACIE HOYT: I think we have to put ourselves in as many advantage opportunities offensively as possible, just meaning our transition. Try and get them in the full court because in the half-court, like I said earlier, they're so long. They've got great size. They've got great speed and athleticism.

The more we can play in the full court, the better off we're going to be because they're such a great team in half-court.

**Q. Yesterday you kind of reflected on your first March Madness win. In a tournament environment like this, how do you find the balance between enjoying those milestones but also knowing there's more work to be done?**

JACIE HOYT: I think knowing there's more work to be done is the joy of it. You get to keep playing. You get to keep competing. In my case, I get to keep coaching a team that I love. That's the joy. The madness of it, the work is the joy. The journey is the joy.

It's something where you kind of take it in, and I did that, had a small moment with my family, put my daughter to bed, and then it's kind of get right back on the saddle.

But that's the grind of it that you love. Competitors love that. I think coaches love that. Pulling all-nighters, watching film, that sort of thing is what makes this time of year so special.

**Q. Jacie, A2 was just in here talking about some of the prominent bigs that she's played against in the past. I'm just wondering, when it comes to her having to counter Lauren Betts, that's a very tall task for just about everybody, but how do you sort of see what she needs to do against Lauren tomorrow?**

JACIE HOYT: I don't think it just falls on her. I think that it's got to be a total team effort defensively. We have seen

some of the best post players in the country in our conference. Ironically, two of them -- Audi Crooks at Iowa State and, in my opinion, Jaliya Davis at Kansas -- they just so happen to be our two plays this year. So we've got a lot of experience going against really great post players.

I think Lauren is different in some ways, but it's the same principle, it's the same concept. I think what has allowed us to be successful against the two posts I just mentioned is high activity level by A2 and her teammate Praise who comes off the bench, and just a total collective team effort.

Lauren Betts is not someone you can stop one-on-one. You've got to have great help. You have to have great rotations. Got to box out and keep her off the glass, and I think that falls on everyone.

**Q. If I can ask maybe a less serious question along the fashion lines, you had quite the eye catching outfit on last night. Are you going to be topping yourself tomorrow? What else do you have in your suitcase?**

JACIE HOYT: I don't know if I'm going to top it, but I will be sporting something from a really, really sweet person who I've got to know just over the last week. She made my pants. Her name is Ellie Fallah, and she happens to be the wife of arguably the biggest fan favorite on our men's team, Parsa Fallah. She always looks so cute at their games.

So when I was in need of an outfit, I reached out to her and said here's what I have. What can you do with it? She flipped those pants for me pretty quick, and she also made a shirt that I'll be wearing tomorrow. Shout out to her. Again, loyal and true. We just keep it all in the family at Oklahoma State. Really grateful that she helped me out last minute.

**Q. Along the same lines of fashion, whose idea was it for Terran's shirt yesterday?**

JACIE HOYT: I did not know Terran was doing that. That was a little bit spicy, a little bit bold of her. That's who she is, and that's who we are as sisters. That sisterhood obviously runs really deep within our program, but obviously with Terran and I being blood sisters, that's a whole nother level.

Ellie also made that shirt for Terran, and I didn't know she was going to do that. I loved it, though. I think that it's just a testament to the loyalty that I have with her being on staff. That's really special for me.

I think as a coach one of the hardest things to do is to find people who are going to have your back in rooms that you're not in, and Terran is that person for me. I know that

she's always going to have my back, and she's going to be a proud sister. She always has been. That's just a really special relationship that I get to have.

**Q. I think you all are, last I looked, 27-point underdogs. I asked Stailee and Timmy about that. They were kind of shocked by that number. They also said that you said they can beat anyone. Is it extra motivation when everyone seems to be counting you guys out?**

JACIE HOYT: Yeah, we really don't get into things like that. I've been on the other side of that where I've been favored and it hasn't gone my way. So that's not something we really put too much stock in.

We know we're the underdogs here, obviously being the lower seed and having a matchup against UCLA, who's been one of the best teams in the country all season long, arguably the best team in the country all season long.

The thing about our team that I love is they just -- they are at their best when we are presented with the biggest challenges. Our best wins of the season have come against teams that are ranked ahead of us. We were picked to be the underdogs in those games as well.

It's really not even about having a chip on our shoulder, it's about enjoying the moment, enjoying the fact we still get to play, and get to be on a stage like we're going to be on tomorrow and be tested with our sisterhood, with our toughness, and the things that we really hang our hat on.

This team is definitely up for the challenge, and I'm excited to see what that looks like.

**Q. You mentioned a little bit earlier that Cori has influenced you more than she probably knows. I wonder if you could elaborate a little on that.**

JACIE HOYT: It's funny how all things are connected. The coach that I played for and worked for, her name is Jane Albright, and I worked for her at the University of Nevada. Jane and Cori are close friends, and I've just always kind of got to be around Cori or had conversations that involve her through that coach that I played and worked for.

When I was at Nevada, I would do a lot of recruiting out here on the West Coast, and then even when I was an assistant at K-State, following up Nevada, would do a lot of recruiting out here. Cori was really kind and gracious to let me into practice and give me a practice plan and let me observe.

I've just always admired the way she goes about things. I

think she's a great teacher of the game. She's a coach who I feel -- I haven't played for her. I can't really attest to it, but from the outside looking in, in those practices, I think she's just incredibly -- she's got a huge heart for mentorship, and she's a great teacher of the game, but I think that she's a great teacher of life to her players.

That's someone that I want to be as a coach and aspire to be and try to be every day. I don't think there's a lot of coaches who are really driven by that honestly, unfortunately, but I do think that she's one of those coaches. I'm really grateful for the example that she has set with that.

But it's through that coach that we kind of have that mutual connection.

**Q. Tomorrow night's game starts at 7:00 Pacific, that's 9:00 in Oklahoma. How do you think that late start time is going to affect the team?**

JACIE HOYT: We've been out here for a while, and the thing about the Big 12, we're kind of used to traveling. You go to the West Coast, you go to the East Coast, we've done it all at this point in time. I don't know if our kids could tell you the time difference, to be honest. It's just they're kids.

The good thing about the late game is they're always up at that time even back home. So I don't really anticipate there being any challenges with that. They just kind of do what we tell them to do and take it all in stride. But I don't anticipate that really being a problem for us.

**Q. During the majority of Big 12 play, you have really honed in on your lineups, using six or seven players. Do you expect to use more depth tomorrow night? You mentioned UCLA having more depth. Do you anticipate getting girls like or Lena or Favour or other players involved Monday night?**

JACIE HOYT: We're just kind of a coaching staff where we do what we feel we need to win at any given point. There's been some games where you've seen some of those players that you mentioned get a little more time, and then some games where that's just not the case. And not because the bench is doing anything wrong, but we just feel like the kids on the floor are really in sync and finding success.

I think at this point in the year, the thing about our top six or seven kids, they're used to playing a lot of minutes. Stailee's had a couple games lately where she hasn't come off the floor. So that's nothing new to us. I think we feel like we're in great shape. That's just kind of what we do.

We don't go to our bench as much.

I'm also confident that Praise and Lena are going to give us good minutes when their name is called, and we'll kind of see what happens. Hopefully we can stay out of foul trouble. That always kind of dictates those decisions as well. Hopefully I don't anticipate that happening.

**Q. You talked about it all season, but Achol, her growth and her importance as the season's gone on. Can you just kind of elaborate on what you saw last night? 28 and 10, just another day at the office for a really talented player.**

JACIE HOYT: Yeah, she was really special last night. The cool thing about coaching her is we've been able to see her getting better and better each game. She has truly been playing her best basketball this past month. I think that says a lot because it's been against teams that are very high profile or even the teams that have really great post players.

I think it's just a testament to her buy-in, what we do. It's a testament to her work ethic. She's the type of kid who will just run through a wall for you.

When we brought her here, we didn't really anticipate her having to play the 5 the way that she has, although our 5 is very different than most post players. We like to really get up-and-down and use our speed and activity as opposed to just back to the basket. So our 5s are a little bit different.

But the way that she's just taken that in stride and found ways to improve each and every game has been really special to coach. I think she's just -- she's just figuring it out. Like I think her best basketball is still ahead of her. I'm excited to see how she can continue to grow and evolve.

I know we have big plans for her this off-season of how we can help her do that and extend her range a lot more, but her versatility is just so special in that position for us. It's been really neat to watch her kind of figure out how to use that versatility.

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