

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

Monday, March 23, 2026

Los Angeles, California, USA

Pauley Pavilion

## Oklahoma State Cowgirls

Jacie Hoyt

Achol Akot

Jadyn Wooten

Media Conference

UCLA - 87, Oklahoma State - 68

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

JACIE HOYT: I'll just start by giving credit to UCLA and what they have here is really special. The environment that we got to play in tonight was incredible, and they have a team that I believe is capable of winning it all. They have got it all. They have got all the pieces. They are by far the best team that we have played this season.

And with that being said, I've never been more proud of our team than what I was tonight and the way that they fought and battled. Obviously, we did not get off to the start that we wanted to, but when you take out that first quarter, we went toe-to-toe with one of the best teams in the country and beat them in the second half. And for that reason, I'm just so proud and grateful to be the leader of this program. I'm so grateful to the two who are sitting beside me and the way that they, I think, set the tone for that toughness and that fight that we wanted to have.

I'm just really proud is the word I keep coming back to. Proud and grateful.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. You really were in there banging quite a bit with Lauren and your teammate as well. When you got in foul trouble, she came in. It seemed like it was super physical in there. Is that what you were experiencing?**



ACHOL AKOT: Like, throughout the whole game?

**Q. Yeah, just really going at it in the post.**

ACHOL AKOT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think it was just a physical game. Everybody on the team was big and tall, so I really had to fight for all everything I got, so, yeah.

**Q. Jadyn, in the third quarter, you guys were engineering that comeback there and you really seemed to -- you were really pushing the pace and that's where you guys got it down to 13. Can you just talk about what was going on there in terms of your mindset and the aggression you guys were able to show?**

JADYN WOOTEN: Yeah, I think one of the things we talked about as a team going into the game is just that transition, winning the transition more. We know that they're really big, but we also have speed as an advantage. So I feel like we didn't get off to the start that we wanted to, but coming into the second half, it was just something that we thought we could take advantage of. So just coming in, doing what we know how to do, and I think that's what got us the run.

**Q. I want to ask you a bit about Lauren. I know you, obviously, respect her as a player. We talked to other players about it. Are you aware what she wrote recently in the Players' Tribune about the mental health challenges she has had? And if you have read it, what are your thoughts about a player having, I would say, the courage to talk about these challenges she's had? Obviously, if you haven't read it, you can't answer the question.**

JADYN WOOTEN: Yeah, I haven't read it, but...

ACHOL AKOT: I haven't read it.

JACIE HOYT: I tell 'em to stay off social media, so I'm actually proud that they don't know.

**Q. You guys have a pretty young team, and I think you guys both still have eligibility left. What are you taking**



**from this experience for the next time you guys are in the tournament?**

JADYN WOOTEN: Well, I think for me, this is my -- you know, luckily my second time playing in the NCAA tournament. Last year we lost in the first round, and this year we got past the first round. So for me, it just kind of makes me hungry to keep stacking, keep building.

I don't know, what about you?

ACHOL AKOT: Yeah, this is my first tournament, so I think I just got all the jitters out of the way. Next year I just expect to -- like, the second round is not a wish, it's expected. So I think just going with that mindset that anybody can be beaten and the start matters. We need to get off with a better start.

**Q. What improvements have you seen within yourselves? If you go back to, like, summer of last year up until now, what improvements have you seen within yourself as a player and as a student?**

ACHOL AKOT: I think for myself, turnovers. I feel like before, I wasn't really confident and there was a lot of turnovers I would make. I think my confidence is up. I know what I can do. I know what my moves are and what I need to, what spots I need to go to. So just being aware of my game and having that awareness.

JADYN WOOTEN: Yeah, I would say the same for me, just with confidence, but also just not waiting to turn the switch on. Just coming out and knowing, you know, the advantages that I have from the start to finish and applying them.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse you to the locker room and take questions for Coach.

**Q. Can you talk about, looking ahead with the foundation you have with this team going ahead to next year, what are your thoughts about what you're going to have next year? I know a lot can change, especially these days with NIL, etcetera, etcetera, and the portal, but what are your hopes based on what you've seen here today for next year?**

JACIE HOYT: I just said it to our team, but I had to stay on the court a little bit longer because I had radio after, and just walking off the floor and seeing a team who gets to host, a team who has stayed together, for the most part, they get to experience all the things that all of us want, and that is so incredibly rare and hard and special. And we can have that here.

The two that were sitting up here, they both have eligibility left, and that core group of kids that we have that aren't seniors that play for us, they all have a chance to have that feeling that UCLA experienced tonight. I really hope and pray that we can keep them together. Unfortunately, there's a lot of noise, a lot of voices, a lot of things that are very worldly pulling at them, and I hope that they choose to just be uncommon and choose a path for themselves that not a lot of kids choose because they get caught up in all the things.

But I really believe that those teams who can stick together -- you know, I think of anyone in the country, really if you look at what we're returning, we're in really, really good shape in our league, nationally, so -- you know, with that, though, a lot of people are going to come and try and tear what we have apart, and I just hope that our kids and the bond that they have, the sisterhood that we have built, and their vision for what we can continue to do will be strong enough to overcome all of that.

**Q. You personally, how do you feel about that, knowing that someone could come in and tear it apart? I mean, of course it's the reality. You can't deny that's the nature of the beast of college sports these days. What are your thoughts on that? I'm sure you wish it didn't happen. At the same time, do you accept it? Is it just you can't focus on it because there's nothing you can do about it?**

JACIE HOYT: Yeah, I've definitely changed my approach or expectations, I guess, of people because that has become more prevalent in the last few years, you know, with portal and NIL and tampering. Let's just call it what it is. There's a lot of that going on. There's a lot of it going on right now. The portal's not open, and I'm having to fight like hell to keep my team together, unfortunately.

But what has never changed and will never change for me is the integrity that I have and the way that I want to go about my business and run a program and be a leader. I just have to pray that my players see that and they want to be a part of it because it is good and pure and very special. So it is unfortunate that that's where our profession is right now, but all I can do is control the things I can control and continue to be who I am.

I think that that's gone really well for me, you know. I'm so fortunate to coach the girls that I do. They are uncommon, they are rare, and everyone got to see that on display tonight. It's really special. The community of Stillwater is really special. We've built a fan base that has just grown to love and appreciate women's basketball, and I didn't feel that when I got there. The amount of little girls in our community who are looking up to our players, I mean, I just

could go on and on about why I think that what we have is so special, and we just have to continue to be who we are as a staff, as a program, as a community, and a university, and I believe that the right people will want to be a part of that.

**Q. I know you mentioned that you have pride and gratitude for the team. If you could just explain to us what was kind of the source of that pride and the source of the gratitude you have. Tell us about the team.**

JACIE HOYT: I think just the way that our girls play the game, the level of toughness, the sisterhood that they have, the way they fight for each other, the way that they never backed down. I mean, UCLA has lost one game all season, right? The majority of those wins were blowouts, like, real blowouts, and it would have been really easy for us to fold after that first quarter, even that first five minutes.

But we never did. They were tough and had a resilience and a grit to them that I was really proud to coach. We're a team of great faith and we talked about wanting to have faith and courage going into the game. And despite what the scoreboard said in that first quarter, I thought we still looked like a team who had faith and belief in what we do, how we do it, had the courage to not back down, and just ran our race, really, really well.

We've about been talking about that a lot as a team, just running the race in a way that we can all be proud of. I felt like we ran our race the way that makes me really proud.

**Q. The other night you talked about how this season ya'll took a step forward winning that first NCAA tournament game. What do you take away from tonight's game against -- you talked about it earlier, against a top-5 team, a really good team. What do you take away from this game and just the season as a whole that can kind of help you moving into this off-season to kind of get you to that next step of making it to the second weekend and making it further as a program?**

JACIE HOYT: Yeah, things take time. Things just take time. And the experience that we got here is something that I know will stick with us. It will stick with me. For me to get that win under my belt felt amazing and something that, you know, I wish I could have had sooner, but that hasn't been my journey and that hasn't been our team's journey.

But the great thing is every year we have seen it grow and get bigger and better. I think that the experience that we had here in getting that first win, getting that taste, that's

something that's going to stick with us in the best, most positive way. So I'm excited to see our kids take this and run with it. It's kind of funny that Achol said she had to get the jitters out because I think she averaged 25 points in these two games.

So I can't wait to see what that looks like when she does have those out. But, no, it's just experiences. There's no substitute for it, and you just have to go through it to figure it out. I know that my staff and I, we got better this year, we continue to get better and figure out what works for us and what doesn't. The same with our players.

I'm really grateful. You know, we've got a couple kids who -- you know, like Praise and Stailee, they have been here longer than anyone, and for them -- Stailee's freshman year, I mean, gosh, we didn't even get to play in a post-season because we were so banged up and didn't have the bodies. So to think that Stailee's freshman year she didn't even get to play in any type of post-season.

And then, you know, to go to the tournament and then win in the tournament, it's just a process that I think is going to continue to pay off in the biggest way for us.

**Q. You mentioned the experience that the whole team has gone through, Lena getting some serious playing time against a top team like this. What did you see from her in her NCAA tournament debut tonight?**

JACIE HOYT: I'm sorry, who did you say?

**Q. Lena.**

JACIE HOYT: Yeah, Lena. No, she came in -- I've said it all season. I think that Lena's fearlessness is kind of her super power. Take it that -- I mean, as a freshman, sometimes they just don't know any better, but either way I like it. And she came in just with a lot of courage. Our two normal shooters that we have in Micah and Timmer, they weren't shooting particularly well. So for her to come in and she actually knocked the first three down, but unfortunately, she stepped out of bounds, but then she hit those two after that. I think it just speaks to the courage that she has, the fearlessness that she plays with. She's been good for us in that sense because she kind of brings a swagger to the floor that sometimes other people don't have. So I thought that was great for her to come in and do what she did on such a big platform.

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