

# 2021 Women's College World Series

Saturday, June 5, 2021

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

**UCLA Bruins**

**Kelly Inouye Perez**

**Rachel Garcia**

**Bubba Nickles**

Postgame Press Conference



Oklahoma - 10, UCLA - 3

**Q. Could you give us your thoughts, you got off to a great start with the Garcia home run and Oklahoma responded right back to give them a little bit of momentum, as well. How did you see the game moving forward from there?**

KELLY INOUYE PEREZ: First and foremost, I tip my cap to Oklahoma. They straight-up came up and they threw punches back and beat us on the field tonight. You know, they are well-coached. They have great athletes. They don't quit either. It wasn't the plan for us to meet up here in the losers bracket, but things happen. I want to congratulate them and hope that they continue to play the ball that they can play. Because to be a No. 1 seed, you've done something right during the regular season, and they are a great team.

For us, as far as the game, yeah, I was so proud. I'm so proud of this team. The way that we came out and responded last night says a lot about who we are. We were more focused, more dialed in, and we had quality at-bats hitting the ball all over the place and playing UCLA-brand softball. And after a night like last night where we literally did not get an outcome at all, to be able to respond against a team like Oklahoma in the losers bracket says who we are.

I'm proud, throughout the game we continued to throw punches and bottom line, we weren't able to get it done. I'm proud of this team and proud of Rachel Garcia. She chose to come back and do all she could to help this program. She was put in position to have to do it all but nobody blames her. She gave it all she had, and I told her, this is not about something that you have to prove. You have left your mark on the game. You have done it, you

are going to continue to have a future. And for all of us, we're just sad that she's leaving the Bruin bubble and I am so proud. I will take Rachel Garcia any day of the week.

**Q. Obviously Rachel is an all-time great. But Not having Megan, how much could she have helped in this tournament?**

KELLY INOUYE PEREZ: I think it's pretty clear that Megan would have made a difference.

**Q. It seemed outside of the game situation, you wanted to savor those last minutes with Rachel. What did that relationship become with her?**

KELLY INOUYE PEREZ: First of all, she's a beast of a softball player and she goes down to me as the best two-way player, I even talked to Lisa about it, like Lisa, you're pretty good, but Rachel has come up clutch offensively more than you ever did. She has impacted the game, just so clutch. Just the highlight reel on Rachel Garcia is epic, and she will go down as the best.

But I was proud of her, because it was a year of adversity for all of us and she was out for part of the season, and when she came back and worked to do whatever she could for this program. It was about the Bruin family. And everybody in the world expects Rachel just to do Rachel and just to stop everyone and be that person. She's more than a softball player to me.

**Q. You're never shy about talking about the love you have for your players and the grit they always keep showing. And you brought up before about the trials they faced during the pandemic and how you all came together during that period of time. For now, wrapping it all up, what do you see about your players that none of us see?**

KELLY INOUYE PEREZ: Oh, we just have such pride for the Bruin family. And I think people say we have culture at UCLA because we win, and I think it's just the opposite. We win because we have such strong culture. This team, our Bruins, our alumni, our coaches, we buy into more than being just a softball team. We're a family. We have each

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other's back. We are Bruins for life. They comeback. It's not just a softball experience, it's more than that.

I sat with all of them right now. Of course I'm disappointed that we lost. We were supposed to have an opportunity to get back to the end, but I'm more sad for the seniors that depart. We took some time -- I apologize that I'm late -- we took some time because we didn't want the Bruin bubble to end in 2021. I'm proud of them, I love them, and I will do any more for the rest of their life. And they will come back because they want to see the younger Bruins succeed.

So we did share a lot of tears right now because it's the end of a season and it's the end of a really strong bubble, and we had some real strong Bruin magic, buy-in, commitment to excellence, respect for the program. I have girls that are honor-rolling, they have to go back and finish files. They are kicking butt on the softball field. Some are continuing on to Tokyo. Some are graduating or in graduate school, and some of them already have jobs.

I'm so proud of them because they are so more than softball players and they are Bruin family for life and I buy into that. My coaches and I couldn't be more proud. We commit, we give, we love these girls, and I can't wait for the future of UCLA Softball. We will be back.

**Q. Speaking of the pride and everything, you have a wonderful opportunity this summer as two of your Bruins get to participate in the Olympics. What does that mean to you in your program and how much are you looking forward to watching them participate representing the United States of America?**

KELLY INOUE PEREZ: I'm so excited. It's so awesome to see the number of Bruins that have been able to compete at the Olympic level. Lisa being my besty forever, being a three-time Gold Medalist and watching her -- I had a great opportunity to get the great view as her catcher, but to be able to see her do it at the next level to go to an Olympics and experience that environment. There is no greater honor than to represent your country.

And so to have more Bruins that are continuing to go and have that experience, I'm so proud and I'm so excited. That is the goal. You want to have an opportunity to play on this stage, you want to continue to play for your country. And the fact that I have two -- there's only three collegiate athletes on that Olympic Team and two of them are mine. I'm so proud and I can't wait for them to get back out there and have them represent the USA. It makes us all very proud of the commitment that they made and the difference. They left their mark on the college game and now they have an opportunity to do it with USA Softball.

**Q. What has Lisa shared with them about the Olympic experience?**

KELLY INOUE PEREZ: She talks about experiences and what it feels like to win gold. I just shared with the Bruins just a couple days ago that one of the coolest things -- one of the girls literally said, "You know, you were on all three when they won gold but you weren't on the team when they won silver?" We're like, hmm, you know. I said, what is kind of cool you guys, 2014, literally kicked butt and was inducted into the Hall of Fame for everything that they did. They broke so many records. They literally killed it in 2004, so they were inducted into the Olympic Hall of Fame as a team, that 2004 USA Softball Olympic Team. They won gold and were inducted into the Hall of Fame.

But what is really cool is Lisa Fernandez as an individual was inducted into the Hall of Fame with her team and as an individual, and the girls just literally looked at her and are like, "You're our coach." She gets to share experiences. She gets to share what they did for the sport, and the girls have so much respect for her and so much respect that she did it, she literally accomplished it.

Like she was the pitcher in the gold medal game in the three-spot, hello. But on top of it, she comes back and gives back. But more than just her softball knowledge, she loves these girls. She is like a mother to them and they know that, too. I think her best coaching has been in these last years because she has more than just the softball knowledge. She cares and she helps develop young women and she literally is there for them both on and off the field. So she's teaching them a lot more than just how to throw a great rise ball.

**Q. You've been together and played together for a long time now, and I want you to tell me about the other player and what you've learned from each other in terms of preparation and how each of you have competed. And Bubba, what have you learned from Rachel, and Rachel what have you learned from Bubba?**

BUBBA NICKLES: Rachel is an amazing person. She knows this. I love her so much. It's pretty incredible that I get to be with such a strong and hard-working person, and she's such a role model to me. She is unfazed by any external noise. She is going to be amazing, whatever she does with her softball career. I'm just so blessed to have her as a teammate.

RACHEL GARCIA: Bubba is absolutely caring and she's going to be my sister for life. I'm grateful that UCLA has given us the opportunity to be teammates, to be best

friends, and I'm glad I had the opportunity to share such moments on and off the field. And I'm excited for what's next for Bubba. She's worked hard in her career and she's a special person to me. I'm super excited for her and I love you, Bubba.

**Q. Coach talked about the UCLA bubble and you've been in it for a while. What does that mean to you?**

RACHEL GARCIA: Yeah, the Bruin bubble is something unique and special, and just being able to represent these four letters for the rest of my life and to be part of the Bruin bubble for life, words can't describe how special it is. Just the alumni giving back to us, showing up when we need it. It starts there with the alumni and just the support system that they give us, and I'm super grateful and I'm super honored to be a part of it.

BUBBA NICKLES: The Bruin bubble is something magical. Just the alumni and just the culture of UCLA Softball, the tradition that goes through this program, it's just incredible. No one ever feels it until they experience it, and it's just amazing the support that us as players, we have from every single person that's a part of that Bruin bubble. Whether we're playing or whether we're done playing softball, whatever we're at in life, everyone is so supportive. And I think that's what's so magical about it.

**Q. You didn't get to walk off the field in the circumstance that you would have liked, I'm sure, but you had a moment with Coach in the dugout. What was going on in that moment and what were your emotions?**

RACHEL GARCIA: I left everything out there on the field tonight, and I couldn't be happier for this team. I mean, we've made it this far and this team is just something special, and I'm super grateful that they were so welcoming with me and Bubba coming back, and just having that moment with Coach. I'll be grateful to her, she gave me the opportunity to get my degree at the No. 1 university, and here I am in my last moment as a Bruin, I'm super honored.

**Q. You've both left a great legacy for this program and the university as you represent them in the Olympics. Five years from now or ten years from now when people bring up each of you in a Bruin bubble or UCLA campus, what do you want them to say about each one of you?**

BUBBA NICKLES: I want them to look at me and I want them to see the spirit that each and every one of these girls had. They made me selfless. They learned -- they taught me how to be selfless and to put them before myself. I

hope that when people think of my name or remember me, I hope they don't think of me; they think of those girls, and just how -- such an amazing impact that they had on my life and just overall the UCLA culture.

RACHEL GARCIA: Yeah, I just hope that they look to us and think of how inspirational we were. I mean, I look to the alumni before me and so in awe that they are still supporting us and watching us throughout the game. Yeah, just to be that inspiration for the younger generation.

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