

# 2024 Women's College World Series

Wednesday, May 29, 2024  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

**UCLA Bruins**

**Coach Kelly Inouye-Perez**

**Maya Brady**

**Sharlize Palacios**

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with UCLA.

We'll start with a statement from Coach.

**KELLY INOUYE-PEREZ:** First, I'd like to just congratulate all eight teams. To get to this point, this is the goal, the dream of every team. I'd like to congratulate all them.

I also have great gratitude for USA Softball, being able to have great support and recognition, as well as the city of Oklahoma.

This is the stage. Our ability to have the opportunity to compete for a championship is something that every player and coach strives for. So we're excited. We're ready to play softball. I love where my team is at. The rest is we're just here to great memories.

THE MODERATOR: Open it up to questions.

**Q. I was hoping y'all could talk about this. I'm sure back in Los Angeles you've talked about it. Just getting to this point after the start for the season. Was there a juncture where you all felt like you turned a corner, became the team that we see now? What is sort of the how that happened from your perspective?**

**KELLY INOUYE-PEREZ:** I'll start.

I don't think there's any ever one time that you say now. But I think the whole season, it's there, there's a journey for a reason. You learn your lessons and really figure out who you are as a team.

I always choose to schedule the hardest path. We play a lot of quality opponents early in the season. The Pac-12 is tough. Along the way we're very clear, I break things down

into segments, about what we're trying to accomplish. We're learning about ourselves as a team. We're learning how to play in a three-game series. We're learning how to never let up at the end of Pac-12. Then you have the Pac-12 Tournament.

Everything has purpose and intent. It did start off rougher. I lost three starters in weekend one. We weren't 100% healthy in the circle. Being able to keep our eyes on the prize of understanding that the best was yet to come was very real. We built a lot of trust.

I believe we're battle tested. There was a lot of emotion and frustration because that's what sports does. There is a clear path from my staff to the players, all of us. We were in it together. We knew we were heading in a certain direction. We had all kinds of moments that we had a decision to make.

When things got hard, certain people quit and other people level up. This team decided to keep moving forward and continuing to improve even though it was very challenging.

The entire season prepared us for that. But there are definitely some great stories when it was hard. Down by seven at home, being able to find a way to stop, fight back, win ballgames.

We were down by game one against Maryland. The team fought back. We won that game 5-4.

Proud of where we are now. Intentional. The decisions were made. I call it Bruin armor. We're battle-tested because we didn't quit when things got hard.

**SHARLIZE PALACIOS:** I think she said it all (smiling).

**MAYA BRADY:** Probably Stanford, I think for us that was a really big weekend just because obviously they're like a great opponent. Going against one of the best pitchers in the country, I think as a little bit of a younger offense, it was a pretty big challenge.

I think for us just being able to go there and end up sweeping, it was just a really big confidence boost for



everybody.

**Q. Obviously this is it for the Pac-12. You have a lot of history with a lot of winning. What does it mean to you to have an opportunity to represent that conference one more time?**

KELLY INOUYE-PEREZ: First and foremost, I'm so proud to be able to represent the Pac-12 as a player, assistant and head coach. There were so many opportunities throughout the Pac to be able to leave our mark as far as the conference of championships. Great memories. Great players. Great coaches that continue to play professionally, to represent USA Softball as well as other countries.

When you think about the greatest that have played in history, the championships, it is the Pac-12. That's a big reason why so many people that wanted to compete in the Pac.

But I'm very proud of our Bruins that had a chance to close out the last regular season, close out the Pac-12 Tournament at champions. That's our goal, to be able to represent the best of the best. As a Bruin, to be able to say we were the first a lot in the Pac-12.

To say we were able to close out in history makes me proud to represent something that I truly believe there is no competition against what we've done. The history speaks for itself. The sport is very exciting. But the Pac-12, we were known for not only athletic excellence but academic excellence as well. I'm very proud, also very sad that it's coming to an end. We're going to start a new chapter and see where everyone goes next year. But for now we're repping the Pac.

**Q. Is it bittersweet in a way because the Pac-12 has been the gold standard for so long throughout history, that this is the end?**

KELLY INOUYE-PEREZ: Bittersweet? Yes, the answer is yes. I mean, I'm just going to say it was out of our control. I think there are things in place that are for the bigger picture.

The one thing when I first found out it was only UCLA and SC. SC doesn't have softball. At that point I was feeling a little bit differently. Now that Oregon and Washington are coming with us, I see everyone is going in a different direction, I think it's changed. No one really knows. A lot of people have asked. I'm still in the Pac. I'm still representing the Pac. I almost don't know what I don't know.

With it, I'll going to enjoy every last moment. I'm going to say winning the Pac-12 Tournament was something that was really special. At that moment we realized it was the last Pac-12 event. That was a really special moment.

I don't really have a lot of emotion on what's next just yet. We're still Pac-12. I would love for the Pac-12 to end on a really high note.

**Q. Mike White said in the last couple of days that it's a huge advantage for OU to always have the World Series here. Potentially rotating it... How do you sort of see that? Do you think it's an advantage for Oklahoma?**

KELLY INOUYE-PEREZ: I'm just going to say we're using terms like the crowd is white noise. I've won championships where we didn't have the most fans in the stands. We definitely have our little section of blue.

It's part of the game. I don't think there's an advantage. I think the players on the field know we have to play. We know it gets loud. We know there could be more bodies wearing a certain color. I don't really look in the stands, so I never know.

I can't speak to things that are out of our control. Right now, I've been able to be fortunate to play as a player here and to be able to see the stadium grow, the fans get bigger, the scoreboards. Everything that's come from how they've grown the sport. This is the headquarters of the College World Series.

Whether they're in, whether they're out, anytime we get a chance to play, it's softball and it's between the white lines. For that, wherever it is, I want to be in it. For now I've been fortunate to have a lot of great memories in this stadium, no matter who we're playing against or who's in the stands.

**Q. Sharlize, you have two young pitchers on your pitching staff that you kind of have gotten to see grow this year. What have you seen from Taylor and Kaitlyn as they've grown through the course of the year?**

SHARLIZE PALACIOS: One of the biggest things that I've seen was just poise in big moments. It seems like the bigger the moment, the more focus they get. I think they're craving those moments a little bit more as the season goes by. We've had some really big moments in the Pac-12 Tournament and just like Taylor coming in to help KT, KT coming in to help Tins. It's nice to see them both have a good relationship, a very supportive relationship.

Also, when they get on the mound, they mean business.



It's really been a cool thing to watch, support each other, but also shine on their own.

**Q. Maya, you mentioned you do have something of a young offense. You have some players who made an impact in the first couple years, but haven't played on the World Series stage before. You have. What does that experience help them be ready?**

MAYA BRADY: Yeah, I mean, for me, I have kind of been in their shoes. I've kind of been lucky enough to be on this stage, kind of be the inexperienced one, kind of just follow the lead of the people above me.

I feel like the biggest thing I'm just trying to instill in them is that at the end of the day, like Coach I was saying, it's softball. Whether we're at Easton Stadium or the World Series, at the end of the day we've been playing this game for 18, 19, 20 years of our lives.

At this point just trying to instill in them the greatness is already in them, it's not something that they need to try to do more, they don't need to try to be anyone else, they just need to be themselves, do what they can to help the team win at the end of the day.

We talk a lot about the story of we is a lot more interesting than the story of I. I think if we come together, like we have been in the later part of the year as a unit, I think that you're not going to be able to tell who has been here and who has not. You're going to see a lot of us smiling and having fun. That's what I'm trying to tell them.

**Q. Coach, a broad one. As you're aware, the agreement involving the NCAA and the conferences last week paves the way for schools to pay athletics directly. Softball has grown, but this development can certainly affect it. Do you worry this change could divert funds from softball to playing football players, or do you believe there's enough momentum in the sport that it's a priority that it will be beneficial?**

KELLY INOUE-PEREZ: That is a broad question and I can say I couldn't tell you what's happening in the grander landscape of everybody else. I believe the sport has done an amazing job of growing viewership. We've gotten into living rooms. People have fallen in love with the sport. There are conferences that dedicated great resources, funds, facilities, coaching salaries, all kinds of things to be able to support the sport.

Unfortunately, I don't know if it's going to be broad-based for everybody. I believe that softball has definitely elevated to a priority sport on campuses and conferences across the country.

I don't fear the sport dying, but I do say I feel badly that I don't believe the amount of teams are going to be able to sustain what's coming in the future.

I don't know. That's just potentially what could happen because we've had conversations of understanding the impact of what could happen, knowing every school is going to have to find a way to be able to fund all Olympic sports.

The world is in a crazy place. We don't really know what's future holds. I feel confident that softball at UCLA, wherever we are, I feel confident we are a priority sport that's going to find ways to continue to get after winning championships.

As far as everyone else, I'm going to hope and pray that everyone else finds a way, as well.

**Q. Maya, you come from a family of very talented athletes. What have they taught you for this moment?**

MAYA BRADY: Yeah, I mean, I think the person I learned from the most in my family would probably be my mom. She was able to pitch on this stage. I think probably from the first year that we were able to play here was 2021, which was obviously my first year kind of fully playing at UCLA following COVID and stuff like that. It was my first opportunity to play on the World Series stage, as well.

I will never forget driving to our first game. She had written me a letter. She literally told me to just soak in the moment, enjoy this time with my sisters, just never take a moment for granted because you never know.

Coming off last year, it was kind of scary. You don't know if you're ever going to come back. I think just being here, just trying to take in those lessons from my mom of appreciation and gratitude, just enjoying the moment with my sisters, the coaching staff, the university that I love, so...

**Q. I haven't seen very many coaches of color in my 10 years here. I wanted to know if Marissa Young, what she has done, resonates with you?**

KELLY INOUE-PEREZ: I am the biggest fan. First and foremost, to the first part of your question, I've been in the sport for a long time. It's true. We have evolved to a very diverse sport. If you look at our team, I'm proud of it. I think there's opportunity from coast to coast.

Everyone now realizes there's a place that you can play in our sport. You can pitch, hit, defend, run. There's so many

different parts of our sport. We're unique. You don't have to be six foot-plus to be able to do it, a certain speed. We're a very unique sport, which leads to more opportunity.

We've been able to get into communities. It makes me think about Natasha Watley, who is one of Marissa Young's best friends. Natasha Watley has been a Bruin, played pro, played to Japan, came back, and now she is running her own foundation giving back to inner city kids in L.A., creating opportunity for them.

The sport has grown. Before you wouldn't see many women of color coaching, playing. We're in a different place. I'm so proud of that. We actually take time to be able to kind of stop and celebrate and learn.

Being able to be surrounded by people that are not like you helps you to be more prepared to do great things, collaborate, have camaraderie and teamwork outside of sport. There's an education piece, awareness piece. We celebrate it.

Getting back to Marissa, I'm such a fan of what she's done as a player, as a coach. It's no surprise to me that her team is here. We got to face them in a super not too long ago. We weren't surprised there. She's a quality coach but a better person. I'm excited that she's been able to build such a strong program and get to this stage so quickly. Says a lot.

THE MODERATOR: That will wrap things up for UCLA. Thank you.

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