

# 2024 Women's College World Series

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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

**Oklahoma Sooners**  
**Coach Patty Gasso**

**Kinzie Hansen**

**Kelly Maxwell**

**Alyssa Brito**

Press Conference



I think that's what is so special about this team, is the love we have for each other. You have 10 seniors that are world-class athletes on this team. Being able to celebrate one another, being able to be here for a fourth year in a row, just celebrate one another, in this beautiful stadium. You see the freshmen kind of following in the lead of not only the seniors but just the standard of excellence at Oklahoma that we've been able to see throughout this entire decade.

Coach Gasso has done a great job of leading by example, the culture we've set, the love we have for one another. That's really special. I think that's what has come to fruition throughout the adversity we faced.

PATTY GASSO: This group of seniors are extremely special to this program. They'll go down in history not just at OU, but I personally would say across the country as one of the best classes softball has ever seen. Proud of that. Proud of their work ethic.

It would be easy to say we've had enough. This is hard and we've had enough. But they're elite athletes. Whether they want to or not, they grind, they work hard.

Their best is always on the biggest platform. What I've been lucky to have as a coach -- and a lot of coaches will tell you, Oh, if I could just have that graduating class back one more year -- and have the perfect storm hit when they came to Norman and it never left.

It's been really a fun but very prideful time for me to just watch them grow, not just as great athletes but into women.

**Q. What was the toughest time, the toughest moment of this season? What sort of has been the key to turning the page?**

PATTY GASSO: The toughest time of the season for me is the fall because they just want to play. They want to play against someone else.

When we got into, like, probably a little bit through

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started with Oklahoma.

We'll start with an opening statement from Coach.

PATTY GASSO: We're blessed to be here, as always. It's not easy to get here. Great field of teams. Congratulate all who made it. We're excited to get started.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up for questions.

**Q. Your recollection of what it was like facing Duke last time? What do you think that matchup has waiting for you this week?**

PATTY GASSO: It was a very exciting game. It was one of our first games of the season. Both teams I know have gotten that much better.

I think they would see us look different. I think we're going to see them look a little bit different. But it was fun. That game made us better. They were really good on all sides: offense, pitching, defense. I expect more of the same.

**Q. Kinzie, as one of the co-captains for this team, what stood out to you about the journey to make it back here, not only for yourself but what did you maybe learn about this team? Patty, you've talked a lot about this group of seniors. What does it mean to be back here? What did you learn about this team?**

KINZIE HANSEN: Absolutely. I think this year we definitely saw us go through a little bit more adversity than normal on the playing field, which now we can look back and say it was pretty fun. Going through that made us all the more better.



conference, but there have been different times. We went on that win streak. I mean, there have been highs and there's been lows. But they've handled the lows like women. They've sat in a room together and they really worked things out, whereas maybe other programs would say leave it alone, let it go. We know that doesn't work.

Our culture is very important to us. They may not all be best friends, but when they're on the field, they are sisters. You feel that. You feel that connection. You feel that energy. We wouldn't be here without that.

ALYSSA BRITO: I feel like OSU series was a turning point, that Sunday we carried into the post-season. I know that was a grind. Just having Kelly's back and other things like that. But also, I don't know, I think that day specifically we focused on celebrating one another.

From then on, that's what we've treated this entire rest of the season and this chapter of what we're writing here. Just celebrating the moments that we have. For some of us, the three here, this is our last. For us, it's cherishing these moments that we get to play on the field together. Also making that impact, that lasting impact, not only for the program, but for our team.

Leaving our sisters better than we found them, I think that's kind of what we felt from that series and that Sunday, that Senior Day that we really had. It was special 'cause it kind of flipped that mindset of not pressing or being something we're not and just being who we are and celebrating and having fun in these moments.

KELLY MAXWELL: I mean, I would agree. I think there's been a lot of learning moments throughout the season, not just one particular area that was kind of tough. I mean, the season is tough for a reason. It's just, like Alyssa said, being able to celebrate this week, these seniors, leaving it all out on the field.

KINZIE HANSEN: I would say one of the most difficult parts of this season was living at No. 1. I think that's something we've had to realize this year. We weren't at the end, but like Coach Gasso said, it's difficult. The past three years, it's been a blessing. But living up there -- it's really hard to get there, but living up there I would say is even harder.

Take a step back and realize who we are as a team, the identity that we wanted to be on our own. That we don't have to listen what anybody else has to say about us except for us. Being able to realize that, that's what Alyssa Brito said about that weekend against OSU.

Being able to maintain our identity and love one another

and be who we are has allowed us to really blossom.

**Q. Pat and Kinzie, you guys have been here a lot. OSU and Texas have been here a lot. Two different circumstances this year. They've had some success against you. The immediate future, very soon Texas will be hitting the trail, OSU behind. How does that factor in?**

PATTY GASSO: Honestly, we don't get caught up in the drama. We get caught up in the moment more than anything. If it takes us going through one of them, we're going to be ready to do that.

We don't get caught up in what happened before. It's really the now. We don't talk about the SEC. It's really the now, everything that we're doing here.

This team, these athletes, know the Big 12. That's what it's been. That's how it's going to finish. I don't know. I don't think we look at them any differently. They're just somebody that is in our way that we got to go through.

**Q. The sport has grown. We've seen replay, extended format at the World Series. What do you see as the next thing that needs to be addressed for the sport to grow?**

PATTY GASSO: If you ask for a review and you win it, you get your review back. Thank you very much (smiling). That's all I got.

**Q. You just mentioned history, your senior class, how it arguably could be the greatest of all time. You win four straight. Everybody wanted to jump ahead at the beginning of the season. You had a process to get to where you are now, a tough season. What does it mean to you to be in position to leave no doubt about this senior class?**

PATTY GASSO: That's a good question, but I just got to tell you that we're not here to prove anybody anything. We're going to do the best we can to win it as a team and not to prove to the world there's no doubt we are the best.

We got to earn this. To get here is difficult. It is difficult. So once we're here, teams have to play their best softball. You've got to go through some great teams to get what you want.

Regardless, no matter what, I will still stand behind the statement that this is the best senior class that has ever been in softball.

**Q. The Pac-12 for so long has been the softball power.**

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**For that to now collapse, I wanted your thoughts how that changes the sport.**

PATTY GASSO: Yeah, I've been around with the Pac-12 and watched some great softball, as well. I was a junior college coach watching these teams beat each other up with other West Coast teams that are in it all the time.

Some of the greatest softball players of all time have played at UCLA, Arizona, and some other West Coast teams. I hope that history doesn't go away because that's where this started. It started on the West Coast, then it lended itself over to Texas A&M, Fresno State, different teams across the country. Then it came to Oklahoma, then to Michigan. You saw it starting to spread itself.

It wouldn't have happened without elite teams on the west coast. I remember Candrea and Arizona beating the crud out of us. I think my first year we played them eight times. We got our tails kicked. But I sat there and I watched and said, How are we going to get athletes that look like them?

One of the best things that happened to me was getting my rear-end kicked by the Pac-12 to learn what elite softball looks like.

I appreciate them for helping me understand what it looks like. They're still doing it. They're still doing it. But it's hard. I'm not even part of the Pac-12, but I am part of the love of this sport and the history of it. That kind of leaves a hole. But I'm going to try to keep teaching our program about it.

**Q. The power has shifted. With you and Texas going to the SEC, do you almost see the SEC taking up that mantle as the preeminent softball conference?**

PATTY GASSO: There's so much talent across the country. I mean, everybody talks about the SEC being so loaded. When you look at who's here, you can see there's parity across. I think the SEC is going to continue to be great, but I also see the Big Ten is going to go to another level.

I think softball is in great hands right now.

**Q. Kelly, Patty talked on Thursday about how important it was for you to stick in there and keep fighting through. As a senior, how do you still take those experiences, learn from it, propel?**

KELLY MAXWELL: I think you can't dwell on it too much. I think just being in this moment, using my experience being here before, just really relying on my team to have my back defensively, the pitching staff. We're all going to maximize

our roles. Then the offense, of course.

Just being able to rely on each other in this moment and know we're here for a reason and we're going to be present.

**Q. Did you learn anything about yourself on Thursday to have season-high walks, but not a bunch of runs, still being able to fight through that?**

KELLY MAXWELL: Yeah, I think it was good for me to kind of go through that. You don't want to be comfortable all the time. It's good. You learn your best from whenever you're uncomfortable. Being in that situation, I think I've learned a lot. I've worked hard this week on just getting back.

**Q. Mike White said earlier this week he felt like a rotation for the Women's College World Series is something the sport should look into. What is your feeling about that possibly happening? Sooner fans in the house when it's here. The advantages, if any, having the event here?**

PATTY GASSO: Well, it's no doubt that Sooners fans come out. If you have it in Omaha, Nebraska fans are going to come out. Where are you going to take it? Who has a 15,000-plus stadium to have it?

There's nothing we can do. It's not our fault. It's no one's fault. It's the people of Oklahoma City that put in the money to make this happen. It's a celebration of that.

You can look at it any way you want. Someone's going to have to put up big bucks to try to get it somewhere else. I know this is a long-term contract, as well.

I don't know. Everybody has their opinions. As long as it's here, we're going to take advantage of it, just like anybody else would.

**Q. You've had great teams obviously to win these things. Is there a common thread you can look at to win this week and say your team had to get this done?**

PATTY GASSO: Well, you want to really play well right out of the gate. It's important to try to get that first game. But we have been in a position where we've lost our first game and came through the losers' bracket all the way through to meet Florida State who did the same a few years ago.

We know what's important, it's to win early. But you have to play well. Obviously it's getting the breaks. Sometimes you're earning things, sometimes you're getting breaks. We just got to take everything we can from it, learn from it.

We got to make quick adjustments at the plate, pitching has got to be good enough for us to make plays on the field, keep the ball in the park, minimize free bases, and we can have a lot of success.

We've got to have at least two parts of our game working really, really well. If we get three, we're going to be a very, very hard team to beat.

KINZIE HANSEN: I would say the common thread through all the years we've been here is the mental toughness and the mental work ethic. You can be the best athlete physically on the field and in the game of college softball, but if you don't have it upstairs, you're going to crumble at the World Series.

I think this is the best arena for college softball. Like Coach said, this stadium, 15,000 people, we're going to war out there in between those lines every single day.

That's something I would say that we work on every single year. Coach described the fall. The fall at the University of Oklahoma on that Marita Hynes Field is pretty grueling. When we step on this field here in OKC, that's when it 100% pays off.

I would say that would be the common theme every single year, for sure.

**Q. Coach, as you're aware, the agreement involving the NCAA and the conferences last week paves the way for schools to pay athletes directly. Big picture, do you worry this change could divert funds from softball to paying football players or do you believe there's enough momentum in the sport and it's enough of a priority that this could be beneficial?**

PATTY GASSO: I feel really good about where our sport is. I feel really good about the momentum of our sport. Through viewership, attendance, so forth.

I just don't know enough about what's going on right now. But I got to trust it's in the hands of those who are going to make good decisions for our student-athletes and for athletics in general.

**Q. Any different dynamic with these two teams you play all the time? How different is it this year because of those two factors?**

ALYSSA BRITO: No, I think at the end of the day it's a rivalry but it's also just a game. I think for us, the main thing that we really just latched onto is not focusing on outcomes. You guys have heard that come from this team a lot.

I think we're playing for 22, which you guys maybe heard us talking about. We play for the 21 right here, and we have another member of our team, and that's Jesus. I think that's our main purpose here. It's not really reading into who's on the other side of it, but it's just focusing on the fact that that's who we're glorifying.

We don't make any game, story, rivalry too big, because I don't think that's our purpose and why we play this game we love. It's to glorify the Lord and have fun when we do it. We're partnering with God when we do it. It's not for a win or an outcome, but it's for the joy and freedom that you get to play, have fun, experience these moments with Jesus on your side. Not for a trophy or anything like that.

Again, just to experience the joy that He really provides to us. That's what I'll say about that rivalry.

KINZIE HANSEN: 100%, totally agree with everything that Brito said.

They've been chasing us for a long, long time. It's been pretty interesting. I've been here for five years now. The rivalry, whether Kelly was on the mound, whoever, they're really good teams. They have some aggressive players. I have a lot of respect for a lot of the athletes on both teams. As we've been playing them for so long, we kind of make friends with them off the field. You see them at the banquet, you say Hi. I think that's really cool. Once you step on the field, it becomes like a war for the Lord and for what we're chasing after.

I think both teams have a lot of success this year. We've had a lot of success. I'm really excited for the Big 12. This is the last year that two of us are here, as well. Us, Texas and OSU are here. We'll be heading for the SEC. I'm excited to have some Big 12 success here at the World Series. Hopefully we get to step on the field with them coming this week.

THE MODERATOR: That wraps it up for Oklahoma.

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