

2025 Women's College World Series

Sunday, June 1, 2025

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Tennessee Lady Volunteers

Coach Karen Weekly

Karlyn Pickens

Taylor Pannell

Laura Mealer

Postgame Press Conference



TAYLOR PANNELL: When I was standing on third, I had full faith in her. No matter how it's going to get done, it's going to get done right here.

Q. Laura, how big is it in your mind when they kind of see (indiscernible) walk McKenna that you just kind of want to come through for your teammates knowing that they don't want to pitch in front of you?

LAURA MEALER: I mean, it's understandable. I've got great hitters in front of me and behind me. So I understand their decision on that. But to be able to pull through for my team in that moment felt amazing.

Q. Karen said during regionals that at UCLA the first time was when she learned not to pull of you out of a jam. You had two today. How are you feeling out there in those moments?

KARLYN PICKENS: Yeah, definitely high-pressure moments. Really all I'm thinking about when those happened is have my team's back. If I get myself in those jams, I'm going to do everything to get myself out of them. But, yeah, just giving everybody an opportunity to get on base, get that run across. Yeah, we weren't leaving without a win.

Q. Karlyn, during that seventh inning where the whole delay ensued, how were you able to stay level-minded not really knowing what the next thing was going happen was going to be?

KARLYN PICKENS: Yeah, no matter what the call was going to be, we're flushing it and worrying about the next pitch. That's not our job to worry about the calls. That's the one over there to worry about that. We're just out there to play.

Q. Taylor, on your home run on the first pitch, were you hunting for anything specifically based on your last at-bats?

TAYLOR PANNELL: (Laughter) No, not really. I was just trying to get the ball down and get my barrel out.

Tennessee 5, UCLA 4

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach Weekly. If you have an open statement.

KAREN WEEKLY: Well, that was one of the most exciting, intense, emotional games I have ever been part of in all my years of coaching, and I couldn't be more proud of our young women hanging in there, not letting what happened in the seventh inning costing us the game.

That's a real battle, and I have to give a ton of credit to the young ladies in our dugout, the young ladies on our bench pouring energy into the team that entire game. They're the MVP that nobody knows about.

Q. Could all three of you give me your perspective of that last hit, the game-winning run. Laura, what were you seeing on that pitch, and how good did it feel when it came off the bat?

LAURA MEALER: Yeah, it was awesome. I worked my whole life in that moment. But in that moment, it felt like 25 of us against the pitcher. Karen even kept walking over to me and was like, The pressure is not on you in this moment. So just staying simple and passing the bat was all that's going through my mind, and I knew my team was right there with me in the box.

KARLYN PICKENS: Yeah, this team has shown that they have my back, have anybody's back 24/7. I think that was just such a cool moment to see that come to life. I knew it was just a matter of time when we were going to score. It was very special.



Q. Taylor, I know we talked about not getting to play in 2023 because you were injured. What has it meant to you being able to hit your stride here and come up big in a moment like this?

TAYLOR PANNELL: Yeah, when I was going a little down, I was like, I'm saving it. So I feel like just really good. And there's really no pressure here, I'm just trying to have fun. I think that's why I'm just, like, letting loose, and the results are coming because I'm just not really trying as hard.

Q. Karlyn, for you, 148 pitches. I'm curious how your arm feels now and what goes into these next 24 hours to being available potentially for more tomorrow?

KARLYN PICKENS: Yeah, I mean, after what this one does, I'm feeling pretty good. Yeah, I'll do whatever it takes. I'll get as much in the tank as I need to be. So I'm good to go.

Q. Taylor, in 2023 when you weren't able to play, what was that number one emotion in your mind when you're watching everyone else play? And what are your emotions now that you are one of the top contributors to this team?

TAYLOR PANNELL: I think it was a cool experience to be on the team and be part of it. Not everyone can say they've been to the World Series. But being able to play this year, I think it's huge. I feel like I'm living out my dream this year. But, yeah, it's cool to be on this team, and I'm excited to play tomorrow.

Q. Laura and Taylor, so right there Karlyn went down, but after she went down a little bit there, she comes back and throws a 75-mile-an-hour pitch. You two guys playing behind her there, what is it like playing behind someone like that with such grit and resilience in the circle?

TAYLOR PANNELL: She's awesome. I think she's a blast to be around no matter what happens. Next pitch, like when she fell (laughter) -- we were just laughing it off, and she just went right back at it, and I think she was throwing harder afterwards. She's awesome.

LAURA MEALER: Yeah, she's a true competitor, and I consider myself lucky to be able to play behind someone as amazing as Karlyn.

Q. Laura, you mentioned earlier this is the game you wanted your whole life. You're a Tennessee kid, came here from middle Tennessee. What's helped you sustain that as you expand more on what it means for

you to be playing here, performing at this level?

LAURA MEALER: Yeah, just as far as the mechanics and stuff going into post-season, I really just quit pressing as much. Like Taylor said, I just wanted to have fun, let go. This was my last season, and I didn't want to have any regrets when it was over. I wanted to leave it all out on the field. It's helped tremendously.

And just being here is awesome with this group of girls and these coaches, and this team it's amazing. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

THE MODERATOR: Any more questions for players? Thank you, players. You're dismissed.

Questions for Coach?

Q. Karen, curious who had seen the play at home plate to maybe alert the umpires about the review that happened and any thoughts you're able to give on that whole situation.

KAREN WEEKLY: I think everybody but four people saw the play at the plate. We saw in the dugout that she missed the plate, and then we saw that her teammates had kind of pushed her back. And by rule, that should have been nullified.

Q. But you notified the umpires of the play to review it?

KAREN WEEKLY: Yes, yes. We went to the umpire and said this is what happened, and then they did their thing.

Q. Can you take a little bit about Laura Mealer and how you have seen her blossom this season after getting one season under her belt here to be able to come up big today the way she did.

KAREN WEEKLY: There's something extra special when you've grown up in the state of Tennessee and you have Tennessee in your heart, and then you get to put across your chest. I've seen that time and time again.

She said it, she pressed a lot this year. It's her senior year. I think there were some goals she had for herself. And if she didn't think she was performing to that level, she was putting too much pressure on herself.

But probably about mid-April I think she just kind of turned the corner for us. And Craig and I had a meeting with her and just talked about when post-season comes around, there's going to be someone that nobody expects. Not the person who is leading the team in hitting, not the people



making All-American or All-SEC, and that could be you.

She, I think, heeded that advice and had to do the work on her own to, like she said, let go. But it's been pretty cool to see what she's done for us.

Q. Just a little bit lost, Taylor has the home run, she almost ended it two other times. How big is it to have that All-American bat that's just flourished this whole season?

KAREN WEEKLY: Taylor is a phenomenal hitter. She's just a pro when it comes to hitting. She loves hitting. You can see the confidence in her when she goes up to bat. And like she said, I just decided to quit putting so much pressure on myself to get something done. And when you play free, your true talents can shine, and that's what's happening with her.

Q. Karen, to see what Taylor is doing here in this post-season and knowing that she sat out in 2023, what does she mean to this team, and how has she taken the charge?

KAREN WEEKLY: I think when you're injured it gives you a new perspective. When you can sit back and watch the game, I think you appreciate the game a little bit more and you see things that you never are able to see when you're playing. So I think she's benefitted from that.

I also have just seen her grow in her maturity in her at-bats. She shakes off things really, really quickly. And she has a plan when she goes up there, and she's going to stick to her plan. And she's willing to go deep in the count to get what she wants.

Q. Coach, how do you keep your pitcher settled after a situation like that with the home run and everything? What do you do? Do you say something? Do you not say anything? What do you do?

KAREN WEEKLY: Well, during that lengthy review/not review, we talked about if it comes back and it goes against us and we're tied up, then we keep playing. So we just kept putting them in that mindset, I think, prepare for the worst, and if the best happens, great.

So I think they were pretty good. They talked about it in the locker room, a couple of them were out there dancing on the field. They were just trying to do whatever they could to stay loose there.

Q. Before the review, obviously Megan Grant is one of the best hitters in the nation, it was kind of an almost similar situation as when -- the Oklahoma game. Was

there any thought in your mind of do we walk her? Do we not walk her? Just knowing what already happened in this World Series.

KAREN WEEKLY: Yeah, the hitter ahead of her was on first base. Right? Am I right about that? Yeah? Okay. So now we push the go-ahead run to second base into scoring position. We just didn't execute very well right there. That's all.

Q. Karen, what is it about this team that allows them to stay so level-minded throughout dramatic games like you have had today, you had on Thursday? What allows them to stay so level-minded?

KAREN WEEKLY: You know, all season long you talk about the process and just wanting them to focus on the process, and sometimes you see it happen, and other times you don't.

But, honestly, I think the things they've worked on all year are coming to fruition at the most important time. They really do buy into we're going to play free and not have any regrets, and they're doing the little things.

Our game plan coming in, actually, this whole World Series, is we're going to breathe, we're going to make eye contact. We're going to have a lot of touching and high-fives. We're going to have a lot of smiles and play free and leave this place, whenever we do -- hopefully it's next week, end of the week -- knowing we have no regrets about how we laid it all on the line here.

Q. Obviously Karlyn can handle a lot, and you guys got her out after one inning on Friday to get her pretty much two days of rest. After going so long today, how are you feeling about her workload going into tomorrow, knowing you have to win two games to get out of it?

KAREN WEEKLY: It's a good thing that she had that rest. That definitely helps. You don't plan to go nine innings and throw that many pitches. But Karlyn is really, really durable. Really durable.

I think that comes from Karlyn is an athlete. She hasn't just been a pitcher her whole life. This is an absolute stud in volleyball and basketball and softball and could be playing D-I in any sport. So I think that works in her favor.

Tonight is going to be all about recovery and hydration and there's no tomorrow. Karlyn is going to be ready to come out tomorrow and fight for her team.

THE MODERATOR: Any more questions? All right.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Thank you.

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