

2026 Women's College World Series

Wednesday, May 27, 2026
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Mississippi State Bulldogs
Coach Samantha Ricketts

Alyssa Faircloth

Nadia Barbary

Morgan Stiles

Press Conference



challenge with Texas Tech tomorrow and just being ready to go. I think the biggest thing for us now is just going to be getting back to a little bit of normalcy and routine the closer we get to game day tomorrow.

Q. I saw someone -- for the players, I saw someone post a TikTok this morning of you guys kind of standing out looking at the field here. Obviously all the excitement when you guys won last week, but now being here and actually seeing the field, what's kind of been the emotions coming into today?

MORGAN STILES: I think we all have been trying to take it in being here. I think I speak for all the team when I say this is our childhood dream. We probably all watched the World Series on the TV when we were all 5 or 6 years old.

I think we're all just trying to, like Coach Ricketts said, be where our feet are and just enjoy the moment.

NADIA BARBARY: I agree, just taking it all in. Like she said, our childhood dream, and we're now on the field. I know everybody's excited to be here. We've all pushed for it for this season. So to finally be here, just taking a second to take it all in.

ALYSSA FAIRCLOTH: Last year this really wasn't an opportunity that I was really realistic for me, so really just trying to be grateful for the opportunity that I've been given this year and just kind of enjoy the moment and take it in and not let the moment get too big.

So getting used to the surroundings and everything today and then to prepare for tomorrow.

Q. Alyssa, this is a big year for you. You have an SEC Newcomer of the Year and then the recent no-hitter in the regionals. What has this year meant for your career and to also be able to do this not too far from home?

ALYSSA FAIRCLOTH: It's been amazing being able to be close to my family. The only series they missed was Texas A&M, I think. They've been at every other game, at least one of my parents, so that's been great.

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Mississippi State head coach Samantha Ricketts and players Alyssa Faircloth, Nadia Barbary, and Morgan Stiles.

We'll begin with an opening statement from Coach.

SAMANTHA RICKETTS: Just really excited for this opportunity for this team, this program, for our university. It is something that obviously is always a dream and a goal, not just for the players, but as coaches as well.

When taking over as head coach about seven years ago, it was the absolute goal and something that we knew we could achieve at Mississippi State when a lot of people told us it wasn't possible. Very thankful for this team and the alumni and players that chose Mississippi State before them that all led up to this moment for us.

And just truly believing that we had all the resources and the talent in front of us that we could be here in Oklahoma City on the biggest stage. I think with that this week right now has been about enjoying the moment after obviously a historic Super Regional for us and also just being where our feet are. We want our players to enjoy every step of this, being present, but then really using today to lock back in and knowing that we're not done yet.

We're going to continue to embrace the underdog mentality. We don't want people choosing us because we want to go out there, play loose, have fun, play Mississippi State softball, which is what we know how to do, and I think we showed a lot of people that this past weekend in Norman.

We're looking forward for another great opportunity and

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Just being able to see all my hard work and everything pay off. My journey hasn't looked like everybody else's. It's just been really great. I'm really grateful for the experiences that have led to this, and I feel like they've prepared me for this moment. I'm just excited. It's just been a lot.

Q. Coach, we spoke before the season, and we talked about all the times you came here to support Keilani when she was here. How does it feel now to be here as the coach and having the family come to see you here at the World Series? Take me through that process of who will be here this week.

SAMANTHA RICKETTS: It's obviously really special and just something that -- if you saw my mom's viral tweet, her first one in four years, that I was the only child who never played here. Again, just really, really cool.

I got to be in the dugout as a GA for Keilani's sophomore season, and then we were in the crowd in 2010 when Stephanie and Hawaii upset Alabama to play on this stage.

Just spent a lot of years here. And playing OU, we played a lot of games up in this stadium with Big 12 Championships and everything in between.

I think the ability to kind of look back and see the growth of our game, not just at this stadium, which has -- just continues to expand across the country and how good softball is and how popular it is across all sorts of the TV, the media rights, everything that goes into it, I think it allows a program like Mississippi State to take this step to this level.

Very proud and thankful to be the one to lead them here.

As far as I know, Keilani is not coming. She's got a lot going on with AUSL. They've got training camp, and her daughter is with her. She made it to the first game in postseason. My brother is coming. He said he'd never miss any of his series in the World Series, so he wanted to make sure he was here this week.

Q. How can you learn from -- I know it's two different teams, both of you, but what can you learn from facing NiJa and Texas Tech a year ago and bring it into tomorrow's matchup?

SAMANTHA RICKETTS: I think really after facing that OU lineup and going into this Texas Tech lineup as our very next matchup, well, a bunch of big bats, a bunch of All-Americans. There we go again. That's kind of the role we've embraced.

We've talked about just David vs. Goliath on Sunday before we went out to the game and how we've been given this opportunity and perspective and just what truly matters, and that's the gifts that this group has been given from the Lord. Making sure we keep it all in perspective in everything we do. Knowing that we've got another big giant in front of us. You can't just sit back and hope something goes your way, you've got to go out there and take it.

You've got to attack, play Mississippi State softball, and that's what we did last weekend. In facing a lineup like theirs, a pitching staff like theirs, we're going to have to play clean in all three phases.

Seeing NiJa last year, it's helpful, but then she's also seen us. I think it works both ways. We also saw her the year before when we got sent out to Stanford for regionals. So it's been three years in a row at this point.

It's always a fun matchup. I think part of why all of us are here and playing in the SEC is we want to play the best. To be the best, you've got to play against them. That's something that we've never shied down from in this program. And that's where I think that work and that experience and the lessons we've learned are setting us up for this moment.

Q. Morgan and Nadia, what do you all remember from the Lubbock regional last year and competing against that Red Raider team?

MORGAN STILES: I feel like they got a million hits against us. We could not shut their lineup down. Like Coach Ricketts said, obviously they're a very talented group. I think we know going into tomorrow that it's going to be a ballgame, but that's what you come here for.

NADIA BARBARY: I agree. We're both two talented teams, and it's going to be a fight until the end.

I remember the Lubbock regional, there was a lot of fans. They were loud. This environment is bigger than that, and I think OU last weekend prepared us for that as well.

Q. Nadia, you've been here all four years. What does this moment and being here and seeing this program get to this spot for you like?

NADIA BARBARY: It's surreal. My freshman year we didn't make postseason, and now I'm here at the World Series. Couldn't have wanted to do it with any other group besides this one. The coaching staff here is amazing. I was never curious to see what else was out there. They

fulfilled everything that I needed. I've grown so much as a player and as a person here as well. I'm always going to be thankful for them.

Q. Obviously a lot of Oklahoma connections here. There's not an Oklahoma team here this year, though. Are you hopeful that maybe the Sooner fans will let bygones be bygones and root for you all this week, or are you fearing backlash?

SAMANTHA RICKETTS: I've had a lot reach out to me. Even this last week in Norman, there were so many that came up and just congratulations, wanted to say hello. Just very thankful for my time in that program, for Coach Gasso. Yes, we're more than willing to adopt some new fans for the weekend. I've got all kinds of shirts. We'll trade in crimson for blue if that's what they want to do.

Q. Talk about Taryne Mowatt-McKinney and the impact she's had on you as a pitcher. And Nadia and Morgan, what's it like playing for Coach Ricketts?

ALYSSA FAIRCLOTH: She's been amazing. She really took the time in the fall to get to know us as individuals. She knows what makes us tick, when we look off, those kinds of things. It's been great to just work with her. I feel like she's more of a friend and we collaborate on more things rather than like a dictatorship or something like that. So it's been really great.

She knows exactly what to tell me, if I'm freaking out or something like that. She's been really great in that aspect. She's been here -- I don't even know how many times (laughter). But just hearing the stories and taking some advice from her from these experiences has also been great.

NADIA BARBARY: My relationship with Ricketts started a long, long time ago. I just think knowing that and our relationship before me getting here just really enhanced my experience when I got here because I was already pretty comfortable with her.

Playing style-wise, we just have fun. There's no added pressure. It's softball. We get to be here. Enjoy your time here. It goes by super fast. So I just, I like that aspect of it.

MORGAN STILES: I don't think that you could find a better person to be your coach in softball, seriously. In the times when you feel like you cannot do anything right and everything is just going wrong and you have no confidence in yourself, she has confidence for you, and she will always be there for you.

Q. Coach, players kind of talk about this being their

first experience here. How much of the conversation is centered on not being overwhelmed by it, but then also maybe using that to your advantage where you're not expected to win the title, and Tech, especially in this first game, Tech is kind of boom or bust this year.

SAMANTHA RICKETTS: We kind of talked after the Super, just re-circled and making sure that we kind of could lock back in, but keep the same mindset, the same energy, and just the looseness about us. I thought that was something that on our way down to Game 3 to Love's Field on Sunday, the way they were just interacting with each other and how loose they were and the fun they were having on the bus, the coaches all looked at each other and said: We're about to win this game.

It was just 100 percent because of the way they continued to trust and be around each other. So just kind of trying to let them be in the moment and enjoy it. I think that's a big part for this program. They know how to have fun, but then they know when to lock in.

With that, I think it's leaning in on the experience, particularly of Coach T. Even our staff, we sat down and asked her, hey, what are we missing? What are the things that aren't in the manual? What are the things that maybe we haven't thought of that we need to prepare for this week?

We're going to kind of lock back in tonight. Typically we let them go with their families. I think it's a big moment, not just for them, but for their families. We're going to have the team-only meal. Coach T is going to address them and talk about this stage, what it means, and how to best approach it.

I'm looking forward to her sharing that advice. That's the big reason why we hired her. There's not many who can say they've been at this stage as a player and a coach and all the success she's had.

Leaning a lot on her, on each other, and just continue to go do what we do best, which is focus on ourselves, play Mississippi State softball, and remember that there is no pressure when this is something that we're very blessed we get to do. It's not something anybody is forcing anyone to do here.

Q. We heard from your players yesterday about how they thought about Broccoli Guy and that whole thing. Going into the Oklahoma series, you're like, hey, whatever gets them to have fun. You made a pretty sizable donation to his GoFundMe the other day. For you, why did you feel it was important to make sure he could be here and to give back to him for what he's



contributed to your team?

SAMANTHA RICKETTS: I think we all are very thankful for that investment. I think it goes back to kind of just the mentality of this program. It's a very blue-collar-type program that's overlooked a lot. We're very thankful in the people that do support us and invest in our program day in and day out. We spend a lot of time with the young girls who are coming to our games and we really try to make sure that everybody who comes around our program feels like they're special and important.

I think with that investment from Jim, from Broccoli Guy, it was the same way. We saw his energy, and I think he helped loosen the team up at the regional. Once they bought in, it was all in, that we wanted to continue to make sure he knew he was a big part of this journey for us as well. I think he really represents the way that we go about our business. It's just being true to ourselves and having fun.

I think that's a big part of our program, not trying to force anyone into a certain box. We want them to be who they are because that's when they're going to perform at their best. He is who he is, and you know what you're going to get, and it's great.

I wanted -- that came from our parents. They wanted to start that GoFundMe. He's a special ed teacher back in the Pacific Northwest, and just knowing what he was investing and giving up to be here, we wanted to do our part to help continue the run and get him into Devon Park this weekend.

Q. Coach, how did 2022, that run where you hosted the Supers and ironically run into Coach T there, help you this year in this run there? Was that the moment that year where you felt that, hey, this program can get to the World Series?

SAMANTHA RICKETTS: I think it definitely was. That was a historic year for this program as well obviously. I think we learned a lot, especially in the fact of hosting the Super and being at home and just the added -- just -- I don't even know if it was pressure, but all the things you had to do. It was just all of a sudden all these things coming at you from every different direction.

And not just us, also the players -- whether it's tickets or families. We need to do this, how do we handle this? I think that really helped coming into this postseason run. Honestly, we've enjoyed being on the road. It's allowed us to be a lot more in our routine and treating them like SEC series.

Really what we've done the past couple weeks, we go to the hotel, we go to hit, we go to the field. It's just rinse, repeat, and do it over and over again. I think it keeps us in that routine of, hey, we know how to prepare. We know what we're doing. Being on the road the past two weeks for postseason was very helpful in that sense. I think it took off some of the added stressors that can pop up in this moment.

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