

2026 Women's College World Series

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

**Tennessee Lady Volunteers
Coach Karen Weekly**

Sage Mardjetko

Karlyn Pickens

Erin Nuwer

Press Conference



celebrating, going to the World Series, and three Supers haven't even started competing yet.

So I think it made for a more relaxing Saturday and Sunday. We flew out here on Monday for the first time, and I think that's helped us a lot just settle in and get comfortable here and not feel rushed.

SAGE MARDJETKO: Kind of like what Karen said, allowing us to get the extra rest time and being calm, coming in here and not feeling like we're rushing from one place to the next.

KARLYN PICKENS: To add on to that, we talk about being the most well-rested tired team, it's always going to be a long season. Winning both games on Thursday was huge for us, being able to rest, reset, get down here early, and get ready for the week.

ERIN NUWER: I agree with all of that. Being in Oklahoma early and getting a feel for the environment is going to be important.

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Tennessee head coach Karen Weekly, players Sage Mardjetko, Karlyn Pickens, and Erin Nuwer. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach, if you have one.

KAREN WEEKLY: Just great to be here. No better place to be this time of year than Oklahoma City. Really happy to do it with this group of young women. I don't know that I've ever had a team where everybody is such a great teammate and really embraces the role they're called upon to play. Just really proud of them and excited to get going and playing ball tomorrow.

Q. Karlyn, I know last time here in OKC, just kind of what are your feelings? What's your mindset heading into this week?

KARLYN PICKENS: I'm super excited. Super excited to be competing with this team. We have a really great group of girls, like Karen said, and we've been on a hot streak recently. Our offense is really coming together. Pitching staff is strong. Ready to just compete and take it one day at a time.

Q. I was wondering if you all could chime in on you had a lot more extra time between Supers and getting here this year as opposed to last year. How do you think that helped the team or helped you prepare for this?

KAREN WEEKLY: I think, when you get that Thursday, Friday, Saturday, it's a bit of a rush on the front end, getting ready to play, knowing you don't have that extra day of prep. If you're fortunate enough to win it in two, it's a lot of nice rest and relaxation, and it's crazy, Friday you're

Q. Proverbs 18:32 is a Bible verse that you've shared. What is the significance of that verse, and what role does faith play in your life?

KARLYN PICKENS: Yeah, so it is for God who arms me with strength, and it's just a really good reminder for me. It sticks there on my glove. So anytime times get hard, I realize I'm playing here for a bigger reason than myself. It's really comforting to have that there, knowing that God is there with me and also my teammates, and I'm doing it for a bigger purpose than that.

Q. For the four of you, talk about Megan Rhodes Smith and her importance in getting the most out of you as pitchers, and, Coach, helping you develop these pitchers.

KAREN WEEKLY: Two years ago, we had two pitchers make First Team All-American, and it's going to be announced here shortly. I fully hope that some of these are going to be on that list again.



Just when you look at since Megan has been back with our program, Megan played for Ralph and I back in '05 and '08, but since we were able to bring her back as a pitching coach, the record speaks for itself. The proof's in the pudding. It's just one All-SEC, All-Region, All-American after another. It's really cool to watch the growth and kind of the vision.

Karlyn was a freshman, you had Karlyn, Payton Gottshall, Ashley Rogers, and Ashley being the senior. I think Karlyn could look now and go, wow, how much have I grown. Here we are three years later, and Karlyn is kind of the leader of the pack, but look at how Sage grew into her role last year from this year. Look how Erin has grown into her role last year from this year.

We're going to move on next week, and Karlyn is going to graduate, and these guys are ready to continue to ascend and step up. So much of that is because Megan is really good at two things. Number one, she recruits people that she knows she can help get better. She doesn't have an ego about that. Some people think they can fix everybody and make them better. She knows which ones are going to fit exactly what she wants and what she sees. Then she meets them where they are.

These guys' bullpens are not the same. Some need more mechanics. Some need more just throwing. Some need more mental games. Some need more of the physical tweaking. Everybody gets what they need, and it's really been phenomenal. I don't know that there's any other program that has pitched and won the pitching honors at the level that we have over the last five years, and I give a ton of that credit to Megan.

SAGE MARDJETKO: I know for me Megan is just super great about doing whatever I need, coaching me in the ways that I need to be coached just physically, then also like the mental side of it. We all say she's not just a cookie cutter type of coach. She's not going to try to make us all do the same thing and make us the same pitcher. She's really good at playing to our strengths.

Also just within the game, calling the game, she spends a lot of time watching film and finding the holes of hitters and also knowing how to use our strengths against them.

KARLYN PICKENS: Pretty much the same thing. I was just going to add she really does a great job of knowing our strengths and what we're really good at and fine tuning those things. Also on the mental side, Megan was a sports psychology major. So she's really done a tremendous job for me helping me with my mental game coming into college till now. It's like night and day.

I think that's a really super important thing on the mound to unlock.

ERIN NUWER: Yeah, I agree, especially with the mental side of it. Last year she pushed me to be the best mentally I could possibly be. This year just working with me on little tweaks mechanically has been such a game-changer.

Q. Karen, last night Jordy Frahm was named the USA Softball Player of the Year. As a team that's played against her this year and last year, just what have you seen from her as a competitor, as an athlete on the field, but also just what she's meant to the sport off of it?

KAREN WEEKLY: The thing that first jumps out at you about Jordy is just the human being she is. Like Karlyn talked about faith, that's very present in everything Jordy talks about. She talks a lot about the love she feels for her teammates and everybody in that program.

I just feel like you see that influence in Nebraska and in how they play the game. I think it's just so refreshing to have somebody like her that is such a star in our game. Obviously a player who can do the things she does on different sides of the ball. Jordy would win honors hitting if that's all she did. She would win honors pitching if that's all she did.

It's really neat when somebody excels at the level she does and then has that platform to then just talk about what's important, and really what's important is your faith and the kind of human being you are.

Q. Karen's talked a lot about this season, how you guys have embraced the roles, embraced the game plans. I'm curious what that process was like for you as a group going into this season knowing how you're going to be utilized and embracing what that meant? Also for Erin and Sage, how different you feel going into this World Series when last year was your first time?

ERIN NUWER: I think just at the beginning of the season, knowing how well we complement each other, knowing we all do different things is super important, and knowing our roles against different teams depending on their bat swing and stuff like that. Then -- yeah.

KARLYN PICKENS: I would say one thing that -- and it's not always the case with pitchers, but we all just love each other so much. We know that, if it's our day, then it's our day to go compete, but we're also going to be supporting and celebrating each other when we're out there.

Knowing at the beginning of the season our roles might look a little different, might be not the same, but it's also really exciting to see what that could turn into. Also, it gives you a little confidence. We have to face teams, and they might not know who's going that day. So it gives you a little extra edge when you're out there competing.

SAGE MARDJETKO: For me at the beginning of the season, it was getting back into the swing of things after not playing all fall. The beginning kind of looked like seeing what I could do and putting me in different roles that I wasn't able to do in the fall.

Then just coming back here this year, just that confidence I have, not just for myself, but for these girls. We complement each other well, and like Karlyn said, we just love each other and support each other no matter who's out there.

Q. Karlyn, getting to compete with Reese overseas? Australia, getting drafted by the same team, and now getting to compete against her in the College World Series, how cool is that to you?

KARLYN PICKENS: Yeah, it's super awesome. Just softball in general, it's great to meet players from different teams and go compete on the biggest stage there is. Obviously we're going to take care of business here on our own, no matter what that may be, and excited to be her teammate in the future.

Q. Coach, over your time coaching at Tennessee, just how rare is it to have what you have here, three pitchers all on their game, all complementary, selfless? How hard is that and rare of a thing is that to have?

KAREN WEEKLY: It is really rare for a lot of reasons. To have the opportunity to have this much talent come into your program, for them to improve, develop, and grow like they have, I really think the only other year where I felt like we were three deep this way was Karlyn's freshman year.

Then for them to see in this day and age, it's so much -- you're enticed to kind of go where you're going to be the star all the time. For them to see the value of being somewhere where you're going to develop and you're going to grow, and because you have the depth, you're going to put yourself and your team in a position to be here in Oklahoma City. And I think that's a blessing for us and just a blessing to have three young women like this.

Q. Coach, what stands out about Texas as you play them? Does it feel like you're just playing SEC season all year round with all the teams you've had to have

run into?

KAREN WEEKLY: Well, interestingly, Supers we faced Georgia, didn't face them in regular season, and we did not face Texas in regular season. Of course we saw plenty of them last year during season and here in the World Series.

Just a phenomenal team from top to bottom, every facet of the game. Teagan Kavan, obviously one of the best pitchers in the game. Gutierrez, another one. I remember when Texas came to our place in 2023 for Supers and all their seniors now were freshmen, and I remember then thinking that is going to be an exceptional team as those women get more experience. Obviously they won the National Championship last year.

Their offense is very dynamic. They've got the righty power. They've got the lefties who can spray the ball all over the field, hit with power, run really, really well. They have a little bit of everything. You don't expect anything less here at the World Series.

They're going to be a tough opponent to beat, but I think our team will be ready for the challenge.

Q. Super slugger Sophia Knight, just what she's been able to add to this offense and the transition she's made from mid-major level to SEC level and what she's added to you guys?

KAREN WEEKLY: Super slugger, I love that. Sophia's been an awesome teammate. She's just calm. I don't think Soph's heart rate goes like this at all. She's just steady. That's a real comfort to play next to a teammate like that. I think she's had an outstanding season.

I think there's still more in Sophia, like we saw it last week, here she comes with the swing, which probably we hadn't used as much this season and really is the difference maker for us offensively against Georgia.

I'm just so excited to watch Sophia as the season progresses and through her career because I just think there's so many weapons there, and the more she gets comfortable with her environment and comfortable in the SEC, she just continues to get better.

Q. Karlyn, what's the balance for you facing the team that eliminated you guys last year? How do you manage the emotions of that of using it as fuel and not making it too big of a deal?

KARLYN PICKENS: I would say the word that just comes to mind is just be present. Focus on one batter at a time, one pitch at a time. Trust the preparation we do the week

coming up here scouting Texas, and really just focusing on one pitch at a time. Not trying to overthink anything or think ahead or think about things from the past.

Q. For the players, you guys have been here twice, Karlyn now three times. Does that experience help not make this moment too big, and is now OKC just the standard for Tennessee?

ERIN NUWER: I would just say every time that we get the opportunity to play in Oklahoma City, just realizing how grateful we are to be here because this has been our dream, like, our whole entire lives. So just taking that in and just embracing it.

KARLYN PICKENS: I would definitely say, going back to my freshman year, the first time being here, it was definitely surreal, like a very star-struck moment, being out there on that field for the first time. Now being here a third time, it's kind of a different feel for me. Just like going out there, competing, not getting too caught up in everything else that's going on and just knowing it's the same softball we've been playing all year round.

SAGE MARDJETKO: I would just say you don't know how many times you're going to Oklahoma City. So just enjoying the moments here and being present, it's not something to take for granted. Most players don't get to go here once, and we've been here twice, three times. So it's just enjoying it while you're here and coming out here and competing.

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