

2026 Women's College World Series

Monday, June 1, 2026

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Tennessee Lady Volunteers

Coach Karen Weekly

Emma Clarke

Karlyn Pickens

Postgame Press Conference



Texas 4, Tennessee 0

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from the head coach. We are joined by Tennessee head coach Karen Weekly and players Karlyn Pickens and Emma Clarke.

KAREN WEEKLY: First, I'd like to thank everybody involved in putting on this event. It's absolutely incredible. This venue is unbelievable -- the experience, the TV coverage. It's just awesome to see what's happened to college softball and how it grows every year.

I want to congratulate the University of Texas. Outstanding, outstanding team. When those seniors on their team were freshmen, they came to our place for Super Regionals in 2023. Even though we won, I remember saying to Mike, your team is going to be a helluva team and going to contend for championships if all those girls stay together, and they've stayed together.

They did what they needed to do today. They've got a very veteran team, very experienced team, and they rose to the occasion with their backs against the wall. Incredibly talented, incredibly experienced, and very, very well prepared.

Also, I'm really proud of our team, really proud of our team. I think a lot of people counted us out, didn't think we'd get here. We certainly had our ups and downs during the season. Then when we got here, probably thought we wouldn't make much noise, and we made a lot of noise.

I told them in the locker room there's never any words to say that's going to ease the pain, but I think for our team the pain is because it's the end of them being together. It's the end of them being together. Absolutely they want to

win a National Championship, but I think it's just as much they want to be together another day, and that's where the sadness comes from.

We're grateful that we're here. We're grateful we're in a position to be sad because a lot of teams aren't.

Q. For Emma, offensively you guys just weren't able to get a lot going today. I know you guys have only four hitters in the lineup who were at the World Series in the lineup last year. You're one of them. Is there something to be said about having been here before and being able to meet that moment?

EMMA CLARKE: I will just say the people that we are today are definitely not the people we were last year. There's been so much growth. Me personally, I felt much more comfortable in the box this go-round, and it's just been much more better for all of us.

Then just being able to pass that on, what little experience I have, to the people who are new to this, it's just trying to get whatever we can get around to each other.

Q. Karlyn, I know that's not how you wanted to finish your time here at Tennessee, but what does it mean to you to look back and see the impact that you've had for this program? And if you could talk a little bit about what you've seen of Karlyn and how she's changed this program.

KARLYN PICKENS: Just my four years here have been nothing but just amazing. I've enjoyed my experience so much. I've been a part of four amazing group of girls, and I think that's kind of the hardest part of walking away from it is just the bonds we have with this team and teams of past and stuff like that.

I'm thankful to have been able to be a part of this program, to be able to put on this uniform and fight for the Lady Vols and my team.

EMMA CLARKE: Karlyn has already left such a great legacy as a Lady Vol and has taught me what it means to truly wear the jersey and just play softball. I could not have



asked for a better pitcher to play behind this year and even last year.

I'm just so grateful for her because she's taught us how to be a leader, how to be accountable, how to love one another, and just truly embodies everything that Lady Vols softball -- like, that's exactly who we want to be. I couldn't be more blessed to get not only one year, but two years with you, so thank you.

Q. Coach, just the emotions behind seeing Karlyn out there --

THE MODERATOR: Just players right now.

KAREN WEEKLY: You mean I don't get to talk about her in front of her?

Q. Emma, just offensively not being able to get anything going, where do you think the struggles kind of came from?

EMMA CLARKE: I think Texas has a really good pitching staff, and we just weren't at our best today. Kudos to them, we tip our hats to them, and they were just better than us today.

Q. Emma, you're a sophomore, right? Your coach was mentioning she saw those Texas players as young players and they kind of grew together. What lessons can you learn, you and some of your younger teammates, by seeing what this Texas team grew into?

EMMA CLARKE: Definitely the growth I've seen players have already from last year to this year, I think that's growth that's going to continue to grow even more. So just using that and just continuing to lean on my teammates to the left and the right to help me grow through that. We all just kind of bounce that off of each other, and we all just eventually grow into the greatest we can be.

Q. Karlyn, your softball career will continue in the AUSL, but what has this Tennessee program given you over the past four years?

KARLYN PICKENS: Oh, gosh, given me so many things, I can't even name them all. I'm just so grateful for my coaches, my teammates, just all the support staff, all the relationships I've made here at Tennessee. It's given me a platform to play the sport I love with the people I love and do so with just so much joy and fun.

I've soaked in and loved every single moment of it, and I'm very excited that my playing days aren't over, but it's definitely the end of a chapter. It sucks that I won't get to

put on this uniform again, but I'm just so grateful for all the experience I've had.

Q. Karlyn, I think we always talk about the veterans that you had growing up, but what was it being like that for Sage and Erin and Peyton kind of this year and beyond?

KARLYN PICKENS: Yeah, I remember my freshman year having Ashley Rogers, Kiki Malloy, Riley West, just to name a few. They were so helpful for me growing into just a young woman and also in the sport as well. Being able to be that for some of the younger girls on our team has definitely been awesome.

We have such an amazing bond on our pitching staff. We just all love each other so much, and we just laugh about the funniest things. It's just such a great relationship that we have. So to be able to hopefully leave a positive mark on them, it's been special.

Q. Karlyn, a little bit similar to that, what is it like for you to have such a strong pitching staff that you can have Sage win a game against Texas just a few days ago, you can have Sage and Erin both hold their own in a game? What does that mean to you, and how does that help your game?

KARLYN PICKENS: It helps my game tremendously. Just having so many arms that we can go to and have so much confidence and trust in one another. Then it also forces the team for preparing purposes for who they're going to prepare for. I think it just allows us all to go out and be confident knowing that teams aren't just selling out for one player, but that we also just trust each other.

Q. Karlyn, most of this team is eligible to return, the pitching staff is. What's your message to them as they go into the off-season?

KARLYN PICKENS: Ooh, on the spot. I would say just to continue to be them, be confident, play with joy, and just win it next year.

Q. Karlyn, obviously we know your college career is over here, but what does it mean to you to potentially be able to come back here as representing the USA with the Olympics coming here in 2028?

KARLYN PICKENS: It's super special. It's definitely been a dream of mine, and I would love to mark that off the bucket list for sure. The sport of softball on its own has done so much for me and grown in so many amazing ways. Just to be able to be part of that and be part of the growth of the sport is super special. I just love this game. I

love everything about it.

Q. Karlyn, definitely a hot day out there. I was curious, were you dealing with any issues with sweat or keeping your hands dry? You were also in the bullpen during Game 1 staying warm. What was it like watching from the bullpen and trying to keep yourself ready and knowing that Game 2 was maybe on the horizon for you?

KARLYN PICKENS: Definitely was a little sweaty out there. Keeping the hand dry kind of was in the back of my mind. Yeah, we tried to fix that as best we could, just using rosin, all that stuff.

Then the first game, just staying ready. Never know when you might go into a game. Yeah, that's my job. It's not my job to decide when I go in, so just stay ready (laughter).

Q. Coach, what I was going to ask you earlier about Karlyn, just sending her out there for one final game, what were the emotions behind watching her play in the circle in Game 2?

KAREN WEEKLY: Yeah, when the game starts, I'm not thinking it's one final game, right? But there's nobody else you want out there in that kind of win-or-go-home situation.

I thought Karlyn battled like the champ she is, and it was a great battle. They just got the best of us offensively. Kavan pitched a great game, but we never could seem to get in a rhythm to really do anything with her.

Yeah, as the game is going on and you're thinking, okay, this could be the last game, I'm trying not to think about it, but you know the time with her was going to come to an end. Just such a privilege to coach somebody like Karlyn.

She is everything you would want in a young woman, in a human being, and I have to give so much credit to her parents and how they've raised her so incredibly loyal.

In this day and age when people jump ship and do it for the dollars, Karlyn had those opportunities, and Karlyn said, no, I'm a Lady Vol through and through. That meant so much to me and to everybody in our university.

Karlyn will have a legacy forever at Tennessee, forever. Her name is synonymous with some of the greats who have come through Tennessee. All you have to say is Karlyn. Everybody knows what you're talking about. Just like you say Peyton or Chamique or whatever, Candace, everybody knows who you're talking about. The fact that Tennessee means so much to Karlyn and the Lady Vols softball program means so much to her is what really

makes my heart happy.

Q. For the game, the first game, was there any consideration of putting Karlyn in instead of Sage, or were you kind of hoping to save Karlyn with a chance of a Game 2 today?

KAREN WEEKLY: Kind of knowing what could be on the horizon, I think you almost have to plan for the possibility of two games. You're hoping to go out there and win it in one. But Sage did such a good job against them the other day. So we got exactly what we wanted out of Erin. We wanted her to get us one time through the lineup without any damage, and she did, and then hand it over to Sage.

Would have gone to Karlyn if we'd gotten a lead at some point in time. That was really what I was waiting for because you kind of have to balance how many bullets are you going to use in Game 1 if you get to Game 2? You want to get to Game 2 and have a good plan with your pitching staff. I felt like we got to Game 2 with a good plan. We got to Game 2 with a rested Karlyn, and pitching wasn't so much the problem today. We just didn't mount an offensive threat.

Q. Why do you think Karlyn became one of the best arms in our sport?

KAREN WEEKLY: Well, work ethic, number one. Determination, Karlyn wants to be the best. A growth mindset, she has this amazing balance of confidence and humility that allows her to be very, very coachable. And she loves to compete, just loves to compete. I've never had an athlete who wanted to own the responsibility of the game.

When she says Karen, I can do it, I can do it, and when things don't go right, my fault, my fault. Karlyn has never blamed a thing behind her, an error, a pitch call, nothing. She wants the ball from start to finish, and she's going to own it.

Q. Karen, you mentioned the 2023 Texas team. You mentioned loyalty of players. Do you think the idea of a team growing into a contender, like you see with Texas and some of your guys, does that get overlooked sometimes, the value of that in this NIL era?

KAREN WEEKLY: I think it does, and I think it's incredibly valuable. You look at how many of those players in their starting lineup today were recruited by Texas are either juniors or seniors, have played from the time they set foot on campus, have played pretty much every inning and have seen a lot of innings and a lot of experiences here

and getting here. You can't put a price tag on that. It's incredibly valuable.

Of course you're going to add a piece here or there, but when you can do it with a nucleus that grows up together in your program and understands who you are and what your culture is all about and they can learn from the mistakes they make and bring them into next year together, that's really valuable.

Q. Kind of going off that a little bit more specifically about the offense, is there something to be said about having faced pitchers in this kind of pressure moment and be able to just come up with the hits when it's necessary? And having Texas return so much of their title, being able to meet that moment against a great pitching staff, what are kind of your thoughts on the offense today and being able to compete?

KAREN WEEKLY: Yeah, there's a lot of things there, and I take full responsibility for it. I think, number one, your preparation, knowing what you're going to face and being ready for it. Also knowing how to handle the moments when somebody is dealing, like Teagan Kavan was today.

I thought we got a little bit frustrated at times, and that took us out of some at-bats. We were chasing things out of the zone and then taking things in the zone, which usually stems from you're kind of overthinking things and getting a little bit frustrated.

Part of that is maturity with players. Part of it's preparation and making sure that they're ready for those moments. Ultimately, it falls on my shoulders, and I take responsibility for it.

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