

Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 7, 2026

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

UCLA Bruins

Cori Close

Lauren Betts

Kiki Rice

Postgame Press Conference



UCLA -72, Ohio State - 62

THE MODERATOR: We welcome UCLA to the dais. Coach Cori Close and student-athletes Lauren Betts and Kiki Rice.

Coach, if you would make an opening statement.

CORI CLOSE: Thank you, media, for being here. We appreciate you. First of all, Ohio State, they play so hard. I just think they just keep coming at you over and over again.

I thought there were plenty of times where we had an opportunity to maybe stretch it out, and they created a quick turnover, got an offensive board.

I just want to say they're a really good team. The way that their guards fight to get around, especially with our four-player mismatch, I just think they showed a lot of fight, and I think they're going to make a deep run in the NCAA Tournament.

Really proud of our team, the composure that they had. We would love to make it a little cleaner and be able to find touches for certain mismatches that we were trying to take advantage of, but again, I credit Ohio State for making that difficult for us. They weren't going to let us just run the things that we wanted to run without forcing some situations where we just had to get downhill and make plays.

I was really proud of only 12 turnovers. We had 7 at the half and really challenged them to do a great job of taking care of the basketball. I only had 5 in the second half.

Secondly, I really challenged them at halftime about how we were rotating and making sure we didn't give up threes. They only got two threes in the second half and limited them to only six attempts, and I thought those two things were really good halftime adjustments that were important to us.

Really proud of our team, and we get a chance to pursue another 1-0.

Q. Kiki and Lauren, Coach wanted you to come out stronger today and be the aggressor. She made a big point of that in the post-game yesterday. Was that in your mind? Obviously you had a great start, up 14-3. How important was that in setting the tone early?

KIKI RICE: That was definitely important. We reiterated over the last 24 hours every game you have to come out strong. Every team is going to be a high-level team. So you don't want to get down early. That was going to be important for us against Ohio State and how we responded to that. We just took it possession by possession and had a lot of detailed focus and didn't let any possession slip by.

Q. Both you guys had good games, but five players on your team scored in double figures. Can you talk about how important the depth is in these important games to really extend your lineup?

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, it's super important. I think this team is really special. This group of girls that we have together is not normal. To be in these type of games, you're definitely going to need every single person. I'm proud of how everyone had the confidence to step up and do what was needed when we needed them.

Yeah, it speaks to the depth of our team. It's just super special. I'm just really proud of how everyone came out today. Even the people that didn't play much, we talked about it in the locker room. They came out and got us a passion play. That means a lot about no matter who was in the game, they came out and tried to help any way they could.

Q. I thought that Angela and Sienna off the bench



were tremendous. Can you talk about their contributions today in helping you win this game and just what they bring off the bench?

KIKI RICE: For sure, they were both huge. I think that was really, really obvious and helpful for us. Sienna came off the bench and had a ton of really, really good defensive plays. That's an area she's been working on a ton. But the way she got deflections, slid her feet and had some really smart plays down the stretch and helped us and motivated us to go on a run. That was super great.

Ange, every time she come in the game, she gives us a sparks, the way she offensive rebounds, she hustles, defends, knocks down shots. The way she comes in and impacts the game is something we're really grateful to have off the bench, and she makes us better every single time she's on the floor.

Q. Kiki, like your Coach touched on in the opening statement, there was a lot of opportunities for Ohio State to kind of narrow the gap. They got it down to ten, nine continuously. You showed a lot of poise to come up with a big bucket and get a good inside look for Lauren on her open three. As the head of the snake on the head as the point guard, what do you look for in those moments to keep your team calm and control the pace of the game?

KIKI RICE: You can see we have a veteran group. In those moments where they went on a run or seems like a key possession, we just have a ton of confidence in each other to make the right play, to knock down the shot, to get the look we want to get. I do think it's about figuring out who do we want to get the shot to, what do we want to force?

As guards, especially Charlissee and I, we've got to be confident in that and Ohio State is a really good defensive team and they play aggressive. It's about taking care of the ball and get what we want. I think we have a veteran presence. We're fine in those moments with teams going on runs.

Q. Gianna had a huge game, 13 points, three threes, and great defense. Can you speak to what her impact has been in the last two games?

LAUREN BETTS: Yeah, she's a sniper. She's one of those players that's always going to be a go-to for us offensively. She's super efficient, and we have so much trust and confidence in her.

She's very consistent for us. To go to your point, defensively, that's something she's been working on all

season. Lately she's been really on top of her stuff, so I'm really proud of her.

I think a lot of our defensive -- what's the word I'm looking for?

CORI CLOSE: Deflections.

LAUREN BETTS: Deflections, all of that, it comes from her. I told her in our SC game, when we played them, all of that pressure that we had started with her. When she makes big plays, I think it's a really big deal for our team. So I'm really, really proud of her.

Q. Double-digit steals and a lot of blocks today. How important was that? Did it feel like you took your defensive game up another notch today?

KIKI RICE: Yeah, defense is something we pride ourselves on. We have a ton of people who can guard all around. Just creating havoc, disrupting people's possessions, and making sure that we're dictating, not them dictating us, is something that we take pride in and we've been focusing on, especially in the postseason. I thought we did a good job of that today.

Q. You slipped Dugalic in the game a little earlier than normal. I thought Ohio State took a while to recognize that. They got the lead and never really gave it up.

CORI CLOSE: That four-player matchup, if they were not going to go double big, that's something that would be a real advantage for us. We wanted to get to that sooner rather than later.

The other part is she does a really good job in press offense too. If they're going to trap the guards or make it difficult, we can always bring it back to that person as a trusted inbounder, and she's really good in those scenarios. That's why I want to her earlier.

I was really proud, one, with our team floundered in those mismatches. But, there were some awareness defensive plays. They hadn't been running that elevator in a long time. Ange recognized it and stopped the play by Chance Gray. I was impressed by those kinds of awareness plays by her.

Her ability to slide her feet defensively allows us to switch more, but also her ability to really be trusted with the basketball against a pressure team, that was a huge part of our game plan today.

Q. You said yesterday this time of year you really don't want survive and advance, you want thrive and

advance. Which one was this?

CORI CLOSE: Closer to thrive, how about that? I think that there were some moments, I thought, a little bit in the second quarter and a little bit in the third that we sort of got sped up, but I thought our responses were really good, and we started out the right way.

It's not that really we went up 14-3, it was more so the energy that we were playing with. I want to piggy-back on something that Lauren said that I think is really important to us. I challenged our bench, I said, if nothing else, when you come in, you should have pride to get a passion play. For us, a passion play is seven nonstatistical categories that we believe lead to winning possessions.

All three -- Lena Bilic, Amanda Muse, and Sienna Betts -- all did that in the first half, which allowed me to rest the guards a little bit more in the first half because I knew they'd have to stay the course in the second.

What I think I'm most proud of our thriving is the way in which everybody made a contribution and chose to be an add to winning possessions.

Q. We talked about the balance of this team. How much is that going to help you the rest of the season, especially a tough NCAA Tournament game where it's kind of pick your poison, especially with some of the people you bring off the bench in addition to your starters?

CORI CLOSE: I think lots of coaches like to say you have six starters or we have seven starters. I think anybody, if you ask anyone else, another coach, they would say the same about us.

I think that, when you have such a deep team that can make high-level contributions, so double-digit points, rebounds, assists, they can impact the game in so many different ways, it just increases your margin for error. Not all of them are going to be on.

I was actually really proud. Right before I came up here, I pulled Gabs aside, and I thought she was really big down the stretch. What I liked about that the most is that she struggled a little bit in that middle of the second half. I just showed a lot of her mental toughness that, when we needed her the most, she was going to be there for us on the defensive end and on the rebounding end.

So I just think there's going to be all of these different moments. When you have as many people that are as skilled as we do, you may not know who it's going to be, but as long as no one cares about the who, I like the fact

that it could be someone different every night because every game is going to force you to adjust.

We obviously want to play through the paint, and Ohio State makes you that you can't just move the ball comfortably to get the kind of paint touches that you want to make. We've got to adjust and do different things, but I think I have the players to adjust and sort of pick your poison, as you mentioned.

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THE MODERATOR: Ohio State, along with Coach Kevin McGuff and student-athletes Chance Gray and Elsa Lemmila are here. Let's go to the first question for Coach.

Q. Kevin, it felt like you guys were always in the game but just didn't have that final push. What are your takeaways from a game like this?

KEVIN MCGUFF: One, UCLA is a great team. I thought they played well today. We played really hard and competed for 40 minutes but just didn't play good enough.

Specifically, their length gave us problems where we turned the ball over, and we also got some opportunities in terms of shots that we got that we were going to have to make if we were going to beat UCLA.

Q. Chance, I wonder, did you guys feel like you did get some shots that you would normally make and they just weren't falling for you today?

CHANCE GRAY: Yeah, that's pretty much what happened.

Q. For either Elsa or Chance, you get a two-in-one trip here, not the final outcome you were looking for. Focus will shift to the NCAA now. Just tell me what the biggest lesson is for you guys heading into the tournament in a few weeks?

CHANCE GRAY: I think we did a good job. We always play really hard. We played to the best of our ability. As Coach said, we just needed to make a couple more shots, less turnovers to beat a team like that.

Q. Coach, can you speak about Kylee, seven points, six rebounds, just how you felt her game has grown during the tournament as a freshman?

KEVIN MCGUFF: Yes. I think that we were probably at our best this year when Kylee was playing both the four and the five for us. She had an unfortunate injury where she was out for a few weeks and fought her way back. I thought she handled herself really well in this tournament and hopefully she will continue to get more comfortable and impact us in a big way when we hit the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Kevin, pacing at halftime seemed to be a lot quicker. Started working in the paint a lot more and scored more points in the second half from that. What was your thought process behind that? How do you think that worked out?

KEVIN MCGUFF: Yeah, we came out at halftime. We looked a little tentative in the first half. I thought our effort, our physical effort was great, but we were a little tight, little tentative in the first half. The second half I felt we executed as a much higher level. We moved the ball, played aggressively, and it led to a lot of great opportunities and we were able to score a little bit more.

Q. Coach, can you talk a little bit more about UCLA's depth and balance. When you can bring players like Angela Dugalic off the bench and Sienna Betts with her defense, how much of a difference does that make with so much balance and depth?

KEVIN MCGUFF: Yeah, that's what makes them really special is they have plethora of talent and depth and length. It's not just the Betts sisters around the basket, but across the board they're really long. That bothered us today, they tipped a lot of balls, a lot of passes we usually get through for shots or at least shot opportunities, they were tipping those.

I think their combination of talent, depth, length really makes them very difficult to play against, that's why I think they've got a chance to make a great run in the NCAA



Tournament.

Q. Yesterday Minnesota's coach raved about Jaloni's ability to finish. Obviously you guys were able to finish a lot better around the basket yesterday. Today was it just their length, or was there anything they were able to do to disrupt you there?

KEVIN MCGUFF: Yeah, I thought we got some opportunities. Their length is certainly a factor because they can challenge a lot of shots around the basket. Then when we did get opportunities where they weren't challenging, we didn't make some we normally make.

Like I said, to beat a great team like UCLA, you're going to have to make those shots. It wasn't like we weren't trying or weren't making the right decisions. I thought we made a lot of good decisions and really put forth great effort. We just had to play better to win this game.

Q. Elsa, Chance had a really strong tournament run here in Indianapolis. When you're looking at her leadership, how important is it to have somebody like that heading into the NCAA Tournament?

ELSA LEMMILA: It's very, very important. She's one of the older players on our team -- first of all, I want to say it's so nice to see how much she's improved since last year, especially around this time. It's so much fun to play with her because she's improved so much. She's driving the ball more, she's just so much more confident. That just gives the rest of the team a better energy, I would say.

She's also a very vocal leader. That's not the only way she's leading us, but it's very, very nice to see.

Q. When you talk about playing better, kind of what goes into that?

KEVIN MCGUFF: I think we've got to turn the ball over less for sure. Then when we get the opportunities on some of the shots that we got, we've got to make a few.

I thought we competed really hard defensively. I thought we competed really hard on the glass. That gave us a chance, but they played a little bit better. They played better on offense than we did, and I think ultimately that was the difference.

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