

UCLA Beats Oklahoma with Walk-off to Clinch National Softball Title



UCLA Athletics

A two-out, walk-off single in the bottom of the seventh inning from sophomore Kinsley Washington delivers a 5-4 UCLA win over Oklahoma at the NCAA Women's College World Series Tuesday night before a sell-out crowd in Oklahoma City.

By [Laurie Lauletta-Boshart](#) June 5, 2019 8:24 AM

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. — Following a 16-3 route over Oklahoma in Game 1 of the NCAA Women's College World Series, the UCLA Bruins were looking to finish off the top-seeded Sooners in Game 2, but Oklahoma was hoping to play the spoiler. Facing elimination, the Sooners had to win Tuesday night to force a Game 3 in the best-of-three championship series. All American Giselle “G” Juarez was in the circle for Oklahoma, while two-time National Player of the Year Rachel Garcia was on the bump for UCLA.

After struggling at the plate in Game 1, senior Sydney Romero opened up play with a leadoff double, igniting the crowd of 8,373 at the USA Hall of Fame Stadium in Oklahoma City as she jumped on the second pitch to send it into right center. But a couple of strikeouts and a hard-hit grounder expertly fielded by third baseman Brianna Tautalafua, ended the inning for Oklahoma with no runs on the board.

UCLA immediately countered with back-to-back home runs from Bubba Nickles and Briana Perez in the bottom of the first, putting UCLA up 2-0. Oklahoma answered with a Sydney Romero home run to left center in the top of the third to get the Sooners on the scoreboard. The celebration was short lived as UCLA’s Aaliyah Jordan homered to center field in the bottom of the inning to push the score to 3-1. It looked as if UCLA would pad their lead when Oklahoma surrendered a walk to Garcia, a single to Tautalafua and a bunt single to Kinsley Washington. But pinch hitter Malia Quarles struck out swinging, leaving all three runners stranded.

Oklahoma’s bats finally came alive in the top of the fourth when Nicole Mendes singled through the right side and advanced to second on a wild pitch. Fale Aviu followed with a single to right center, plating Mendes. Raegan Rogers came in to pinch run for Aviu and advanced to second on a passed ball. Lynnsie Elam stepped up to the plate and doubled to left field on a 2-2 count, scoring Rogers. A strikeout and a groundout ended the inning, but the Sooners had tied the game at three a piece.

The score stayed knotted at three until the bottom of the fifth inning when Tautalafua opened the inning with a towering home run to left field. Down to their final out, Oklahoma's Shay Knighten, who two years ago hit a game-winning home run against Florida in the 17th inning in the championship series, sent a two-out solo home run to left center to tie the score at four in the top of the seventh, and keep the Sooners chances alive. But the Lady Bruins were determined to see the game through and immediately put pressure on Oklahoma in the bottom of the seventh.

Senior Taylor Pack singled to left field to start the inning. Pack moved to second on a sacrifice bunt by Tautalafua, but was thrown out at third on a fielder's choice. Sullivan advanced to second on a wild pitch and was replaced with pinch runner Jacqui Prober. The Sooners were one out away from forcing extra innings, but Washington, who was 6 for 8 in the championship series and 2 for 4 on the night, sent a two-out single to left field to score Prober and the game-winning run, giving UCLA a 5-4 walk-off win over Oklahoma. UCLA clinched its 12th National Softball Title, more than any other program in history (UCLA's 1995 national championship was later vacated by the NCAA's Committee on Infractions). The team charged the field, dogpiling Washington who ended up on the bottom of the celebratory pile. The sophomore from Whittier had been using her speed to get on base throughout the series, but the pressure was on during her last at bat. "Coach always says that pressure is a privilege," says Washington. "So, I guess I had the biggest privilege tonight."

Winning pitcher Rachel Garcia, who was named the WCWS Most Outstanding Player, was overcome with emotion as she dedicated the game to her grandfather Bob. "He was just that life for me," said Garcia. "I knew he was right there with me the entire time. And I can't believe I get to share this moment with all of them," she said, gesturing to her teammates.

UCLA head coach Kelly Inouye Perez was savoring the win, and the team's first title since 2010. "Every title is special, but this one even more so because of this group of seniors. I am so proud of how this team responded and did not get rattled, even when Oklahoma tied it up twice. We just battled and battled and stuck to our game plan and came out with the win."