



2019 NCAA Championships May 16-25 • Orlando, Fla. • USTA National Campus

Women's Semifinal: Recap and Quotes

#1 GEORGIA def. #5 DUKE, 4-2

ORLANDO, Fla. – The No. 1 team in the country has earned a place in the championship match against defending champions Stanford. The Georgia Bulldogs never trailed Duke in the overall match score, but needed a victory in one of the evening's two three-set matches to advance.

With the Bulldogs clinging to a 3-2 lead, freshman Meg Kowalski won her second deciding set in as many days to clinch with a 7-5, 5-7, 6-4 victory. At the No. 6 singles spot, she defeated Duke's Margaryta Bilokin, who herself clinched Friday's quarterfinal for the Blue Devils less than 24 hours prior. Kowalski led, 3-0, in the decider before Bilokin closed to 4-3 and 5-4.

When the match concluded, Georgia junior Marta Gonzalez and Duke junior Meible Chi were knotted at 5-all in their final set. Gonzalez, the ITA's No. 19-ranked singles player, was on the brink of defeat in set two, trailing 6-1, 5-1, before mounting a comeback to extend the match deep into the Orlando night.

There was nearly a third three-setter on the night, but Georgia's Vivian Wolff won a second-set tiebreak, 9-7, on Court 4 after her opponent, Kaitlyn McCarthy, saved multiple match points. Wolff's 6-3, 7-6 win put the Bulldogs on the brink of the championship match, turning a 2-2 deadlock into a 3-2 Georgia advantage.

In a much-anticipated showdown on Court 1, ITA No. 2 Katarina Jokic fought off a late charge from Duke's freshman phenom Maria Mateas, who was ranked in the WTA's Top 300 earlier this year.

To start the match, Georgia cruised to the doubles point, winning the Top 2 spots and leading at No. 3.

QUOTES

Georgia freshman Meg Kowalski

On what makes her so tough in final sets:

“I don’t think it’s me getting me through matches, I think it’s my teammates. Being able to look down on the courts and see my teammates have my back and rooting for me, it’s definitely what pulled me through these last few days.”

On helping Georgia get to the championship match:

“It’s so incredible. I know we’re all so excited for tomorrow. We’ve worked so hard to get this point. We’re ready to finish it off with a good day tomorrow.”

On being a comfortable and confident freshman on the team:

“I committed to Georgia my sophomore year, verbally committed, and I was just so ready to get on the court and play with the ‘G’ on my chest ever since that day. I mean, when I do ball machines at my academy, every shot I hit, I was like, ‘This is for Georgia!’ To be able to be here, it feels like this is the best year of my life. I get three more? This is amazing. It’s just a privilege to play for Georgia every single day.

Georgia Head Coach Jeff Wallace

On Meg’s love for the team:

As a coach, that’s your dream right there. She’s right, she bought into the Georgia Way. We have something we call the Georgia Way, it’s about winning for your school and your teammates, and that’s what she’s done from the moment she walked onto this campus. The results aren’t surprising to me because of the work ethic and just how much she’s taking to college tennis at the University of Georgia.

On the eagerness to get to the NCAA Championship after winning National Indoors:

Back in August and September, when we were doing morning runs or workouts in the weight room, we didn’t talk much about the National Indoors. We talked more about the NCAAs at the end of the year. That was really our focus. I think the National Team Indoors was just an amazing experience for us. We really learned how to play and compete as a team at that event. We learned what fighting and just staying out there for each other was all about. I just feel that our focus for the year has been about this day tomorrow. All the experiences we’ve done as far as every practice, every weight-room training workout, every run, every match we’ve played is the path to tomorrow.

Georgia Head Coach Jeff Wallace (continued)

On playing on the road for a championship, instead of hosting:

It's different. We've certainly played on the road at the NCAA Championships too. Athens is a special place and we've had the NCAAs there many years. It's a lot of fun when it's there, but I've got to say they're doing a great job here, too. The Tennis Channel addition has really been key and great for us, the exposure. The hospitality and the eagerness of everyone here to help out in every way has just really been great. Selfishly, I'm a Bulldog and we love it in Athens, but I have nothing negative to say about my experience here so far, obviously.

On camping out on No. 1 for a bit during the match

For most of the year I've been on No. 1 with her [Katarina Jokic]. I just wanted to get her off to a good start, so I was there for the beginning and obviously she won eight straight games and she was up, 6-0, 2-0, and just playing unbelievable. That really was the highest level of tennis I've seen played here by anyone this week. Then all of the sudden, it gets interesting. I was over trying to help out with some other matches and I saw the scoreboard, so I decided to go back.

Kat's just got another gear, she's a special player and has done some really amazing things in college tennis and she's only a sophomore. We spoke a little about sticking to the game plan and just focusing, keeping that line of forward thinking, point after point. She did a great job. She literally closed that thing out and got our second point pretty quick. That was huge for us, and the second night in a row she's been the first one off the court in singles. She's locking it down and playing some high-level ball.

On the team's history against Stanford:

I guess history would be like this: we played them this year, and in an epic battle very similar to the last two matches we've played. Found a way to win that one. We've played them three times in the finals in the NCAAs, so this will be our fourth time playing them for a championship match. We're just looking forward to the opportunity.

Duke Head Coach Jamie Ashworth

On Bilokin's aggressive play in the pressure moments:

That's how she [Margaryta Bilokin] has to play against Meg [Kowalksi]. I think Meg has lost one dual match all year, or something like that. Meg makes you come up with shots. Margaryta, in the last two sets, did everything we asked her to do. Be aggressive, try to force issue, don't play into her hand of pushing. She won that way last night, she lost that way tonight. That's kind of a hitter's mentality, but she did what we asked her do there.

On Kelly Chen winning after suffering from severe cramps after last night's match:

The effort Kelly [Chen] put in was amazing. After last night, we weren't sure what we were going to get out of her. We knew she would give 100 percent. We weren't sure what that 100 percent would be. Couldn't be prouder of that, the effort she put in to be able to come back today against a really good player. She knew it was going to be a physical match, she said just this morning, 'I know it's going to be physical,' and it was physical. A lot of forward movement, a lot of low, slice balls that can tax your legs and back. She gave us everything she could and it was great.

On how the length of previous night's match affected tonight affected today:

For sure in the doubles. I honestly thought we didn't show up in the doubles, it was too quick and there was no emotion. Our doubles were way too flat. We challenged them after the doubles and got on them pretty good and showed them this is what we play for. We have to show up, we have to be tougher, this is what we work for and this is the opportunity we have.

I thought maybe last night took a little out of us in doubles. I think we got our legs under us a little bit and realized where we were and what we were playing for and gave it everything we could in singles. Georgia played a great doubles match but their singles is tough too.

Duke Head Coach Jamie Ashworth (continued)

On the season as a whole:

It was a different season than we've had. We got beat three times by UNC throughout the year. I felt like we've been right there with the best teams in the country. We came down here with the goal of winning the whole thing and believed that we could do so. I saw a lot of improvement with our doubles, I saw a lot of improvement as a team. They came together as the team. I thought we started off the year with a bunch of individuals and came together as a good group.

It's obviously bittersweet to lose today but you get to play for a national championship, you get to be in the Final Four and you're right there, and one point here or there makes a difference. I think all around it was a good effort and I said in the beginning of the week, we left last year losing the Final Four hungry. Hopefully the group we have coming back is hungry to get back here and give ourselves a shot.

On USTA National Campus hosting NCAAs for the first time:

The people here did an incredible job. The USTA and everybody here, every committee member I've gotten the chance to talk to and thank. From a coach's standpoint, this is my 24th one of these and they made it so easy on us as coaches.

From the facility just to the little things, with practice courts. Talking to other coaches, it's been an unbelievable experience to play here and I thank everyone here for the effort they've put in. Hopefully, we have the chance to come back in two years and be a part of it.