

Round 1: Music: Die with a Smile by Bruno Mars and Lady Gaga

I, I just woke up from a dream
Where you and I had to say goodbye
And I don't know what it all means
But since I survived, I realized
Wherever you go, that's where I'll follow
Nobody's promised tomorrow
So I'ma love you every night like it's the last night
Like it's the last night
If the world was ending, I'd wanna be next to you
If the party was over and our time on Earth was through
I'd wanna hold you just for a while and die with a smile
If the world was ending, I'd wanna be next to you
Ooh
Oh, lost, lost in the words that we scream
I don't even wanna do this anymore
'Cause you already know what you mean to me
And our love's the only war worth fighting for
Wherever you go, that's where I'll follow
Nobody's promised tomorrow
So I'ma love you every night like it's the last night
Like it's the last night
If the world was ending, I'd wanna be next to you
If the party was over and our time on Earth was through
I'd wanna hold you just for a while and die with a smile
If the world was ending, I'd wanna be next to you
Right next to you

Next to you

Right next to you

Oh-oh, oh

If the world was ending, I'd wanna be next to you

If the party was over and our time on Earth was through

I'd wanna hold you just for a while and die with a smile

If the world was ending, I'd wanna be next to you

If the world was ending, I'd wanna be next to you

Ooh

I'd wanna be next to you

Round 2: Literature

What Kind of Times Are These

By [Adrienne Rich](#)

There's a place between two stands of trees where the grass grows uphill
and the old revolutionary road breaks off into shadows
near a meeting-house abandoned by the persecuted
who disappeared into those shadows.

I've walked there picking mushrooms at the edge of dread, but don't be fooled
this isn't a Russian poem, this is not somewhere else but here,
our country moving closer to its own truth and dread,
its own ways of making people disappear.

I won't tell you where the place is, the dark mesh of the woods
meeting the unmarked strip of light—
ghost-ridden crossroads, leafmold paradise:
I know already who wants to buy it, sell it, make it disappear.

And I won't tell you where it is, so why do I tell you
anything? Because you still listen, because in times like these
to have you listen at all, it's necessary
to talk about trees.

Round 3: Current Events

A San Jose State University volleyball player is at the center of controversy over transgender athletes. Here's what we know

By Taylor Romine, CNN

8 minute read

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The San Jose State University women's volleyball team line up for the national anthem before a game against Colorado State University in October. Santiago Mejia/San Francisco Chronicle/Getty Images/File

CNN —

[San Jose State University](#) will face [Colorado State](#) Saturday at the [Mountain West Conference](#) tournament final in women's volleyball after a months-long controversy and ongoing legal challenges claiming there is a transgender player on the team.

Over the last several months, multiple teams in the Mountain West Conference, as well as one other team, [refused to play against San Jose State](#). The dispute continued as several athletes from various schools in the conference filed [a federal lawsuit](#) earlier this month seeking to stop a San Jose State player from competing in championship games.

For many athletes, a tournament final would usually be the culmination of a season of athletic prowess and achievement. Instead, San Jose State made it as No. 2 seed due in part to multiple conference forfeits.

Neither the player in question nor San Jose State University have commented publicly on the player's gender. CNN is not naming the player since she has not publicly discussed her gender and declined to comment through a university official.

Colorado State advanced to the finals of the Mountain West Conference after beating San Diego State Friday. The team has already played San Jose State twice this season. On Friday, Colorado State coach Emily Kohan told [The Associated Press](#) her team plans to play in Saturday's final match.

What the NCAA says about transgender athletes amid the San Jose State controversy

San Jose State effectively advanced to Saturday's final match when Boise State announced Wednesday it was withdrawing from its semifinal match against the Spartans. [In a statement](#), Boise State officials said its team "should not have to forgo this opportunity while waiting for a more thoughtful and better system that serves all athletes."

San Jose State said it was disappointed over Boise State's decision but its volleyball team "looks forward to competing for a championship."

"In this time of Thanksgiving, we are especially thankful for those who continue to engage in civil and respectful discourse. We celebrate and support all of our students, including our student-athletes as they compete for our community on this holiday weekend," the university said in a statement Thursday.

As the Spartans head to the final tournament match in Las Vegas, here is what we know about the controversy surrounding the volleyball team this season:

Athletes' complaints began after an online article was published

While the player has been a member of the San Jose State volleyball team since 2022, concerns over her participation appeared to surface following the publication of a news article in April discussing the player's gender. San Jose State senior setter and co-captain Brooke Slusser said the player told her at the time that she identified as a transgender woman, according to the federal lawsuit filed by athletes in the conference, including Slusser, against San Jose State staffers and others.

In the months after the article was published, Slusser complained to team staffers that her teammate's participation "was not fair to the girls and put them at physical risk," and warned them that other teams in the conference would not play against them, according to the lawsuit.

There is a lack of significant research – and scientific consensus – on whether trans athletes, particularly trans women, have an athletic advantage over their cisgender peers, even after they have undergone testosterone-reducing therapies. Though research is ongoing, [a 2017 review in the journal Sports Medicine](#) found "no direct or consistent research" showing trans people have an advantage.

Boise State withdraws from Mountain West volleyball tournament match against San Jose State amid transgender claims

Experts say it would be nearly impossible to determine what gives any person an advantage. For example, it is hard to determine whether testosterone exposure that a trans woman would have before transition, provides more of an advantage than a person who was born tall – which [studies show](#) can run faster because of it – or having a variant of the [ACTN3 or ACE genes](#) that may give an athlete a genetic advantage for speed and strength. Just like cisgender athletes, trans athlete’s abilities vary.

When the season began this fall, some volleyball teams forfeited their games against San Jose State. [A total](#) of five teams – Wyoming, Southern Utah, Utah State, Nevada, and Boise State – forfeited seven games before the championship tournament began this week.

Boise State, which forfeited three games since September, and three other teams did not disclose a reason for their decision when announcing they would not play against San Jose State. More than a week before announcing their forfeiture, [the University of Nevada](#) said players independently refused to participate in the match and noted that declaring a forfeit “for reasons related to gender identity or expression” was a violation of Nevada laws and other laws and regulations. Two days before the match, [the university said](#) it didn’t have enough players to compete.

The five teams all canceled their games apparently because of rumors that San Jose State has a transgender player on their team, AP [reported](#).

The Mountain West Conference transgender participation policy states athletes must be deemed eligible by the NCAA. If a team refuses to compete against another team with a transgender student-athlete, the team “shall be deemed to have forfeited the contest,” according to [the conference’s handbook](#).

San Jose State told CNN in a statement its student athletes are in “full compliance” with NCAA rules and regulations, and the volleyball program is operating “under the regulations of both the NCAA and the Mountain West Conference.”

As teams forfeited their games, governors from [Idaho](#), [Wyoming](#), [Nevada](#) and [Utah](#) shared posts on X saying they supported the teams' decisions to not play against San Jose State. Each of them mentioned the importance of ensuring safety for female athletes.

Workers monitor a women's volleyball game between San Jose State and Colorado State in Fort Collins, Colorado in October. Santiago Mejia/San Francisco Chronicle/Getty Images/File

Student athletes sue conference to keep team member from playing

Twelve people, including a current San Jose State women's volleyball player, filed a federal lawsuit on November 13 against the Mountain West Conference, arguing the league's policies for allowing transgender players violates the rights of other players. In addition, the plaintiffs claim the participation of the player who is allegedly transgender was a safety risk because "no other player in the conference" had her "combination of power and explosiveness."

The commissioner of the Mountain West Conference, the California State University Board of Trustees and several San Jose State staffers are also named as defendants in the lawsuit.

As practice started for the season, Slusser said the student in question "was hitting the ball with more force than in 2023 and far harder than any woman they had ever played or coached with or against," which made other players worried they could get injured, the complaint says.

The player has competed at the college level in three previous seasons, including two for San Jose State, and had drawn little attention, AP [reported](#).

The plaintiffs sought an emergency order to immediately stop the player from competing in the conference championship tournament. They asked the court to declare any athletes assigned male at birth as ineligible to compete in women's volleyball within the conference and for the San Jose State University women's volleyball team, the complaint said.

They also asked the court to rule on whether the conference's transgender participation policy violates Title IX and the First Amendment, according to the complaint.

Two courts have allowed the player to continue, for now

On Monday, US Magistrate Judge S. Kato Crews rejected the lawsuit's emergency order request to block the San Jose State women's volleyball team member from playing in the conference tournament, which started Wednesday.

In the ruling, Crews said the plaintiffs didn't meet the need to have a court order immediately banning the student from playing in the championship and said they failed to prove "irreparable harm." He noted injunctions are meant to prevent harm, and in this case "most (if not all) of the alleged harm has already occurred."

"The movants have failed to meet their burden to show irreparable harm, a likelihood of success on the merits, or that the balance of harms or equities is in their favor," the ruling said.

Court rejects request to sideline San Jose State volleyball player on grounds she's transgender

Crews noted none of the defendants disputed that San Jose State has a trans woman in the women's volleyball team. In addition to that, the Mountain West Conference referred to the player as one or more transgender student-athletes competing in the league in their response to the lawsuit.

The 10th US Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the decision Tuesday, saying it agreed with the lower court as they could have sought relief sooner.

William Bock III, an attorney for the plaintiffs, said Wednesday his clients are disappointed in the decision but were encouraged because the appeals court noted the case presents “a substantial question and may have merit.”

The plaintiffs look forward to receiving justice in the case and to the day trans athletes “no longer are allowed to harm women and wreak havoc in women’s sports,” Bock said in a statement.

The Mountain West Conference told CNN Tuesday they are “satisfied with the denial” of both emergency requests from the plaintiffs and “will continue to uphold the policies put in place by our Board of Directors which directly align with NCAA and USA Volleyball.”

San Jose State University and the California State University system, which the university is a member of, applauded the courts’ decisions and the volleyball team for their good attitude.

“The fact that they have come to this point of the season as a team standing together on the volleyball court is a testament to their strength and passion for their sport,” San Jose State officials said in a statement.

San Jose State is having a strong season despite the legal challenges

Despite the multiple forfeitures, San Jose State has won more games than they did last season.

The team has a 14-6 record through the 2024-25 season so far, compared to their 13-18 record in the 2023-24 season. In 2022-23 the team finished with a 21-9 record. The player has competed in the current and past two seasons.

Thanks to its record this season, San Jose State came into this week’s Mountain West Conference championship in Las Vegas as the No. 2 seed, meaning they had a predetermined spot in the semifinal. On Saturday, they will face Colorado State for the conference’s title and an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament.

The team has not competed in the national tournament since 2001, AP reported.

San Jose State coach Todd Kress previously told AP his team received “messages of hate” this season, which have taken a toll on his players.

At a November 19 game against Fresno State University, some fans carried signs showing support for both the San Jose State player and those who filed the lawsuit against her, The [Mercury News reported](#).

Round 4: Science and technology

Robot that watched surgery videos performs with skill of human doctor, researchers report

Breakthrough training system opens 'new frontier' in medical robotics

Date:

November 11, 2024

Source:

Johns Hopkins University

Summary:

A robot, trained for the first time by watching videos of seasoned surgeons, executed the same surgical procedures as skillfully as the human doctors, say researchers.

Share:

FULL STORY

A robot, trained for the first time by watching videos of seasoned surgeons, executed the same surgical procedures as skillfully as the human doctors.

The successful use of imitation learning to train surgical robots eliminates the need to program robots with each individual move required during a medical procedure and brings the field of robotic surgery closer to true autonomy, where robots could perform complex surgeries without human help.

"It's really magical to have this model and all we do is feed it camera input and it can predict the robotic movements needed for surgery," said senior author Axel Krieger. "We believe this marks a significant step forward toward a new frontier in medical robotics."

The findings led by Johns Hopkins University researchers are being spotlighted this week at the Conference on Robot Learning in Munich, a top event for robotics and machine learning.

The team, which included Stanford University researchers, used imitation learning to train the da Vinci Surgical System robot to perform fundamental surgical procedures: manipulating a needle; lifting body tissue, and suturing. The model combined imitation learning with the same machine learning architecture that underpins ChatGPT. However, where ChatGPT works with words and text, this model speaks "robot" with kinematics, a language that breaks down the angles of robotic motion into math.

The researchers fed their model hundreds of videos recorded from wrist cameras placed on the arms of da Vinci robots during surgical procedures. These videos, recorded by surgeons all over the world, are used for post-operative analysis and then archived. Nearly 7,000 da Vinci robots are used worldwide, and more than 50,000 surgeons are trained on the system, creating a large archive of data for robots to "imitate."

While the da Vinci system is widely used, researchers say it's notoriously imprecise. But the team found a way to make the flawed input work. The key was training the model to perform relative movements rather than absolute actions, which are inaccurate.

"All we need is image input and then this AI system finds the right action," said lead author Ji Woong "Brian" Kim. "We find that even with a few hundred demos the model is able to learn the procedure and generalize new environments it hasn't encountered."

The team trained the robot to perform three tasks: manipulate a needle, lift body tissue, and suture. In each case, the robot trained on the team's model performed the same surgical procedures as skillfully as human doctors.

"Here the model is so good learning things we haven't taught it," Krieger said. "Like if it drops the needle, it will automatically pick it up and continue. This isn't something I taught it do."

The model could be used to quickly train a robot to perform any type of surgical procedure, the researchers said. The team is now using imitation learning to train a robot to perform not just small surgical tasks but a full surgery.

Before this advancement, programming a robot to perform even a simple aspect of a surgery required hand-coding every step. Someone might spend a decade trying to model suturing, Krieger said. And that's suturing for just one type of surgery.

"It's very limiting," Krieger said. "What is new here is we only have to collect imitation learning of different procedures, and we can train a robot to learn it in a couple days. It allows us to accelerate to the goal of autonomy while reducing medical errors and achieving more accurate surgery."

Authors from Johns Hopkins include PhD student Samuel Schmidgall; Associate Research Engineer Anton Deguet; and Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering Marin Kobilarov. Stanford University authors are PhD student Tony Z. Zhao