



# WTA 500

**Sunday, April 5, 2026**

Jessica Pegula def. Yuliia Starodubtseva  
6-2, 6-2  
Final Round

**An Interview  
With Jessica Pegula**

**THE MODERATOR:** Jesse, congratulations. What does it mean to you to be a back-to-back winner here in Charleston?

**JESSICA PEGULA:** Yeah. Incredible. Yeah, incredible feeling being back to back. I wasn't really thinking too far ahead as if I could do it, but yeah, now that I'm here, I'm very happy. It was a lot of hard work; 11 hours and 22 minutes I was told on the court. So we're here.

**Q.** I think with doubles it's even more.

**JESSICA PEGULA:** It might probably be more. Yeah.

**Q.** I imagine when it was finally over, there just had to have been a little bit of a weight lifted after the grind you've had this week. Just talk about that.

**JESSICA PEGULA:** Definitely. I mean, it was definitely the best level I think I showed today. So I'm happy that I was able to do that in a final, just being up a set and 5-0, and then she played two really good games and a little longer games, and I was like, okay, I don't want to get back into this story line of me having to grind out this match. So I was really happy with the way I was able to just win that last game pretty convincingly just after all the matches I have been through.

And, yeah, it was definitely kind of a huge relief and just nice knowing that I can go home and relax for a couple of weeks before I have to start up again.

So, yeah, it's just nice when you can kind of end on a good note. You know you're not rushing to another tournament. You get to go home. Yeah, there's no better feeling really.

**Q.** Also, just a note on her. It doesn't feel like it's a one-off. She seems like a player who's probably going to be around in the late rounds at events.

**JESSICA PEGULA:** Yeah, especially on clay. I think it really suits her game. She's really tricky. I think maybe she wasn't playing her best. I think I was playing at a really high level. But then you could see at the end there that, like, she didn't miss a ball for like two games, and I was like, oh, she's going after it right now. And I think that's probably what caused everyone a lot of issues earlier in the week in her earlier rounds here.

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Yeah, she's a tricky player, definitely very good on clay, and I think I honestly just had to execute what I needed to do perfectly, and I kind of did that today. But if I wasn't playing as well, maybe like the other days or variables change, she's definitely a very good player, very talented and good hands. Yeah.

Q. Congratulations.

JESSICA PEGULA: Thank you.

Q. And, also, I wasn't able to be here last year. So thank you for doing this again. I'm wondering, especially just backing up what you just said, Jesse, if during the match you were able to stick to pretty much to a plan or did you have to make some shifts?

JESSICA PEGULA: No. I think I stuck to my plan very well from the start. I think not only did I stick to it, I was able to execute it. I think even sometimes when the games or her level was kind of picking up at times and she played some good points, I think I was able to like go right back to what I know I needed to do and not let her kind of lull me into playing her game, and I was able to kind of nip that in the bud, I guess, anytime it felt like it was starting to shift.

And so I'm glad that I just really trusted my instincts today, and that, I think, won me even some of the close games and helped me kind of run away with the sets there.

Q. Jesse, congratulations. Really just feel like you've played this tournament at every stage of your career. Maybe you would even consider this to be your break-through tournament, 2013, qualifying, making the third round. What do you remember about that time, if you can get super sentimental for us, and just, generally speaking, what this tournament has meant for you.

JESSICA PEGULA: I don't remember at all. What did I do? I qualified and made third round?

Q. Yeah. You beat Muguruza and Mona Barthel.

JESSICA PEGULA: Oh, yeah. I remember beating about Muguruza. Yeah, that was wild. That was like before, right when she started to kind of like be Garbiñe. But we were literally on, like, this back court, and like nobody watched us, which is crazy. I totally forgot about that.

Yeah, I've come a long way since then, but this tournament was always, I think, or very early on in my career a really big tournament for me because, I think I said before, I would get a wild card, and at times I was still training here and from this area, and it was like one of the WTAs that I had a chance to do well in.

And there's a lot of history here for me, not just training here, but like you said, playing this tournament so many times, and now being able to say I've conquered it a couple of times in a row now and had really good results in the past as well. I think it's one of those tournaments where I always knew I felt really comfortable and could play really good tennis, and I think there's some weeks throughout the year where you feel that and you hope you can play well.

I've always kind of had that feeling about some of the tournaments that I've actually won. So I think just the last couple of years I've been able to say, like, okay, you know what,

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I've played good tennis here; I want to win this tournament has helped me just kind of, I guess, be able to accomplish that and kind of get through the finish line.

And that started from even when I was, yeah, super young and playing Garbiñe in the first round on some random court.

**Q.** You said on court that you thought Yuliia had an amazing story. Have you learned about her this week and what do you find remarkable about her story?

**JESSICA PEGULA:** Yeah. My coach was kind of telling me about it earlier today. I kind of knew like a little bit, but I didn't really know exactly, and he was like, oh, she has an amazing story. Just the fact that, yeah, she played at Old Dominion and then was teaching tennis for a year and didn't really have the funds to play and all these crazy scenarios, and I think it's just an incredible story.

We have so many amazing stories on tour, and I feel like hers is definitely one people can get behind and cheer for and root for. I just thought it would be nice to highlight that a little bit, not just for her, but I think for all the different story lines that we have in our sport, which I feel like is what makes our sport so great. Everyone can kind of relate to somebody else on different levels and become fans, and that's how our sport ends up growing and getting bigger.

**Q.** Now that you have a matching set, have you thought about how you're going to display them at home?

**JESSICA PEGULA:** My one from last year is actually slightly broken. Yeah. I don't think I ever told Bob, but it actually somehow fell off of a table into a suitcase, and thank God, the suitcase -- if the suitcase wasn't there, it would have been shattered. And it actually just broke like the top.

So I'm like, oh, now I have another one. I can just put that one and replace with that one. It doesn't look horrible, though, because it's just the top. But, literally, it was one of those things that happened in slow motion. I was like, oh, my God, and I was like, I don't know how that didn't shatter everywhere. So, yeah, story time. It'll be next to the other one, though.

**Q.** Being a two-time champion here, what is it like for you to know, in the annals of this tournament, which is quite historic, that you're alongside Serena and Navratilova and Evert and Austin and those multiple winners here in Charleston?

**JESSICA PEGULA:** I was looking at the thing just to see who else has won back-to-back years, and I saw Serena. I saw Chrissie won it maybe like four times in a row. I'm not sure I'm going to be able to do that, but at least I got back to back and I can see my name kind of next to some of those amazing players, and anytime you can be somewhere in a stat with athletes like that, I think it's incredible.

So it's always fun to look at those things, and I saw Chrissie gave me a shout-out the other day as well, and I know Tracy has been here a lot, and I've seen her every single day.

Yeah, it's just special. Whenever you can creep into a stat belonging with those women, I think you take that and are happy about that.

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**Q.** Congratulations on defending your title. It's never easy playing someone for the first time, let alone in a final. What do you think was the greatest challenge she posed, and how did you neutralize it?

**JESSICA PEGULA:** Yeah. I think she really wants to dictate with her forehand. I think I had to kind of attack her second serve and take some risks there, especially on the clay. I think she likes to set up her forehand with her serve. So I wanted to take that pattern away as much as I could.

And, actually, yeah, I thought I played pretty smart. I wasn't afraid to hit to her forehand and still wanted to move her, but was able to kind of pin her in the corners and make her have to maybe go for too much.

**Q.** You jammed her a lot I saw.

**JESSICA PEGULA:** Yeah. So I think that was something -- my ball was kind of moving through the air pretty good. I was feeling pretty good with my ball striking.

So I think once I felt like I was feeling the ball, I was able to kind of really commit and go for my shots, whether that was hard up the middle, pin her in a corner and then really try and look to move in when I could.

And as far as my serving, I didn't think I had to go for too much on my serve today. I just wanted to kind of set up the point as much as I could and hit my spots and kind of more place my serve and not really hit anything too big.

So, again, I think I did a good job of executing kind of everything that I needed to. And then also feeling it out as I played. Sometimes you're feeling where to serve or where to return just based on the feel of how the match has been going and stuff like that. So I was able to really kind of trust my instincts throughout the whole match.

**Q.** Good day for the podcasters.

**JESSICA PEGULA:** Yes. It was.

**Q.** Going to be a dedicated episode?

**JESSICA PEGULA:** We did drop a live from the player party episode that involved the magician, involved Bob Moran. There was a lot of things going on. And we dropped it today as a bonus episode. So maybe that was good luck for me and Des today.

**End of Interview**