

# Atlantic Coast Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 4, 2026

Duluth, Georgia, USA

Gas South Arena

## Cal Bears

## Coach Charmin Smith

## Sakima Walker

## Gisella Maul

### Postgame Press Conference

California 75, Wake Forest 52

CHARMIN SMITH: Really proud of our group today. I think Wake Forest makes it really challenging with their zone and their length. We settled in in the second quarter and were able to get a convincing win.

All we want to do is just try to stay in Atlanta as long as possible. It's a good day for the Bears.

**Q. Coach, you come off a dominant performance before this one; you beat SMU by a bunch and it seems like you had the momentum going on both offense and defense. Like you said, you want to stay here as long as possible. What do you think you've got rolling right now that has Cal in such a good momentum?**

CHARMIN SMITH: I think confidence is a big piece, what you mentioned. We knew in that SMU game one of our goals was to get ourselves going. We talked about that specifically; we wanted to finish strong and have some momentum heading in here to Atlanta. We shot the ball really well against them. It's hard to play against us when G and Lu and our shooters are making shots; and then you add on Sakima inside with a double-double, that inside-out presence is something that we really want to have, and I thought it helped us today for sure.

**Q. I talked to you at tip-off about kind of having to change up your game from playing a lot of threes to having Sakima down low. Can you talk about Sakima's impact this season and what that's meant?**



CHARMIN SMITH: Yeah, we can't do it without her. That was evident in the first quarter of this game. When she was dominant in the second quarter, it really changed the whole feel of the game.

It gives our perimeter players more confidence when she's dominant. I'm just proud of how she's worked and the roll that she's stepped into with this team. We told her that she'd be a big piece of our success.

A double-double in the first round of the ACC Tournament is a great way to start, and I think she has a lot more that she can continue to do.

**Q. Sakima, obviously this is your first year with Cal. Can you talk about your growth from last year to this year, and then of course shining today in the ACC Tournament?**

SAKIMA WALKER: I would just say my confidence has grown, like just from coming here. My teammates and my support staff and everyone at Cal, honestly, even from outside of basketball has just continued to pour into me since I've gotten here, and I feel like being confident really helps.

**Q. For Coach or the players, you guys went 13 deep today. Is it nice to be able to get everyone in on the first game on a day where you're trying to win a bunch of games in the same number of days?**

GISELLA MAUL: Yeah, I would say we've had a lot of dogfights throughout conference play, so it was an amazing feeling to just get everyone in the game and have some people get a chance to rest their legs and be ready for tomorrow.

CHARMIN SMITH: Good answer, G.

SAKIMA WALKER: I just want to say, I agree. Our goal, we tell ourselves as a starting five, like let's get everybody on the floor today. Let's push the lead. We did that today.

**Q. For the players, just talk a little bit about the**



**balance that you guys have across your whole lineup. I know we talked about 13 players, but four or five players in double digits scoring. It looked like it was a total team effort. Talk about the balance you guys have.**

GISELLA MAUL: I mean, the emphasis was to play inside out, and I think we have so many weapons down low. Then we have a lot of good shooters. I think it was just a matter of we emphasized getting the ball to the middle and playing from there.

From the middle, we had chances to kick it out for the threes and also look down low to Sakima. I think we just did a great job with that.

**Q. Gisella, you've gotten a lot better this season. You were kind of in contention for most improved player. What are some things that have helped you this season make that jump?**

GISELLA MAUL: Yeah, I think it really started with getting healthy. I worked with our strength coach and our trainers a lot this past season getting healthy, getting my body right.

And also just mentally feeling okay. I think that was a big piece, too. The coaches have done a great job at helping me with my confidence and just trusting in me and believing in me. I think that's the biggest thing that's helped me make this jump.

**Q. Coach, just talk a little bit about the depth of this league, because you mentioned how good Wake Forest, their defense can cause issues, and now you've got another challenge ahead of you tomorrow. Just the depth that it's not an easy win each time you go out there.**

CHARMIN SMITH: Yeah. I mean, not only is the ACC challenging, but it's also March. So everyone is trying to step up their game. No one wants to go home.

We're excited about another chance at Syracuse. I think that game was one of the -- probably one of the best games in our conference play for the whole conference. It was really exciting. We didn't like the way it ended. I think Coach Legette-Jack does a phenomenal job with her program, and we're happy to still be playing.

**Q. The return of Barnes and how that impacted the game.**

CHARMIN SMITH: Yeah, she was a threat in the middle of the zone. She has size that can match up and guard

forwards, so she helps us a lot defensively. She lets G get back to the three, which I'm sure she appreciates.

It was really good to have her back and to see her out there. It was good to also be able to rest her and not use her legs up completely as she's just returning. I thought it was a good day for Taylor and for us.

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