

Atlantic Coast Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 5, 2026

Duluth, Georgia, USA

Gas South Arena

Cal Bears

Coach Charmin Smith

Sakima Walker

Gisella Maul

Postgame Press Conference

Syracuse 70, California 59

CHARMIN SMITH: Obviously we're disappointed that we don't get to continue here in Atlanta. We just had a really awful start against a really good Syracuse team. I'm proud of how we fought in the second half to cut it to five, to have a chance. But ultimately we just dug ourselves too deep of a hole that we couldn't get out of.

Q. When you played Syracuse back in January on the road, you played a similar game, had a rough first half and were able to make it close at the end. Obviously ended in a triple overtime defeat there. What do you think you learned about Syracuse from that game that you tried to carry over tonight?

CHARMIN SMITH: I mean, what we learned is that they're really good on the O-boards, and we learned that we need to take care of the ball. We didn't do those things very well again today, which made for a carbon copy of the same game with the same result.

Q. Plus 11 in the third quarter. What did you see in the first half that you were able to kind of adjust at halftime and try and exploit from Syracuse?

CHARMIN SMITH: Yeah, I don't know that there was anything that they did. I think we were really bad in the first half. We couldn't make a shot. We weren't defending very well. I think we did a much better job on Phelia in the second half. I think she was 4 for 5 in the first half. She ended the game 6 for 10. We forced them into 21 turnovers. My guess would be that most of those were in the second half, a lot in the third quarter.



We picked up our intensity level, and we fought, and we just didn't have enough fight to start the game. They're too good for us to play the way that we did to start the game.

Q. What was the game plan to start Uche Izoje heading into today and what you learned from the last time you faced off against her?

CHARMIN SMITH: Both games, foul trouble is -- I know she wants to try to stay out of foul trouble. I think she was 6 for 10 in the first half. And honestly, when you have a post player that's shooting jumpers, it's tough. It's not like she's back to the basket, dribbling three or four times, allowing you to double her. A lot of her moves and shots were really quick.

I thought as we were closing in on the lead and getting stops, the press helped us. It helped us give her a shorter amount of time to operate. It got the ball out of her hands. Some people rushed some shots, turned it over when we were in the press. That was something we did to limit.

I think Sakima did a solid job. I think she's a really good player. And I think Sakima Walker was 9 for 15 and is a really good player, as well. And we needed more. The bigs sometimes neutralize each other. She had a great game. You would expect that from Izoje.

Q. For Sakima, I was wondering from your perspective what you did to adjust to Izoje in the second half when you were able to get going offensively.

SAKIMA WALKER: Just being patient and knowing that she couldn't foul. Just being physical and working to get deep positioning. I noticed that she was kind of not letting me get to her body, so I just used that to my advantage to get to the positions I wanted to get to.

Defensively I just started fronting her and she had a hard time getting open and trying to get the ball at the end.

Q. What did you guys see in the full-court press that made Syracuse speed up? Where did you guys find

some advantages there?

CHARMIN SMITH: Yeah, I think obviously they were also missing Dom, a big part of that, and didn't have their primary ball handler. We started the press with her, and I think they're a team that you can be aggressive with and get up and pressure and force some turnovers, force some rushed attempts.

It's not what we do consistently, so it was a push for us to do that. We had to do something to mix it up and give ourselves a fighting chance. I think it worked well for us again to get the lead to five and to have chances towards the end, and I'm proud of that fight.

Q. Gisella, one for five in long-range in the first half. Talk about the adjustment at halftime going from a tackling type of approach.

GISELLA MAUL: Yeah, I think I knew my shots weren't falling, but I still knew that if I had the confidence as if I was going to shoot, then they would still fly out at me and that would give me the lanes to drive. My mindset was, my shot is not falling, so let me see if I can get down and attack and see if I can get there. And I was able to get to the line a lot. When the shot is not falling, then just looking to attack.

Q. Charmin, despite the result today, there still is the potential for postseason play. If it does end up being a WBIT or WNIT invitation, is that something the program is interested in accepting?

CHARMIN SMITH: Yes. We want to play. I think we're capable of more. I think the WBIT is a phenomenal experience for student-athletes. I think this is who we are. If that's what we're selected for, this is the team that we are. We're proud of who we are. It gives us more time to play the game that these young women love together with this team that they love. We'll be fired up and ready to go.

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