

# Atlantic Coast Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 7, 2026

Duluth, Georgia, USA

Gas South Arena

## Notre Dame Fighting Irish

## Niele Ivey

## Hannah Hidalgo

### Postgame Press Conference



Duke 65, Notre Dame 63

NIELE IVEY: I want to start with saying how proud I am of this team. This team is one of the hardest-working teams I've ever coached. Resilient. They fought. We had a lot going against us. We had adjusted the physicality of this game, and they gave me everything.

Talked about it in the locker room, that it was a seven-point game. We didn't start the game like we wanted to, wasn't playing our style of basketball. They came out there in their 20 minutes and they left it all on the floor.

This group has grown. We've matured. We've learned how to play with each other and play for each other, and it has been honestly phenomenal. I talked to everybody about how much joy I have in coaching this group, so I told them, don't hang your heads on this. It does not define us. It's only going to make us better and stronger.

But again, I'm just really proud of this team. We will take this, learn from it, regroup, recharge, and get ready for the tournament.

**Q. For Hannah, I was just wondering, 26 seconds left, dribbling the ball at the top of the key on that last possession and you decide to kick out to Cassandre for the first shot of that last possession. What was your thought process in the final possession of the game?**

HANNAH HIDALGO: Making the smart play. I talk about I trust my teammates. So it would be very hypocritical of me to say I trust my teammates and then not kick it to them when they're open. I trusted that I drove and I drew Cass's defender, that she was going to knock down that shot, and

I would do it again.

**Q. Coach, you just kind of touched on it a little bit that today's game was really everyone fighting, leaving it all on the floor. How do you take the lessons from today and build them into the NCAA Tournament?**

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, some of these lessons and experiences you don't know about it until you're in it. So everybody that was on that floor, our team, they have not had that experience, they had it today, knowing you have to be physical, you have to be tough. And these games come down to every possession matters and the margin of error is very, very small. So those are the things that we're going to take from this game.

Obviously there's technical things -- our offense, rebounding, things like that, those are technical things. But some of the things that we'll take away from this is going to make us better.

**Q. Hannah, how important is it for you to have three spectacular performances despite the loss today going into March Madness?**

HANNAH HIDALGO: I mean, I really give all credit first and foremost to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, just to be able to do it three times in a row. It's hard to play back to back to back.

Then really proud of my teammates. They make it so easy for me to be able to do what I do. They take a lot of pressure off me when I'm driving and then collapse and I'm able to kick it out to the shooters. And if they don't collapse, I'm able to get into my mid-range. So big shout out to my teammates for that.

**Q. Coach or Hannah, you talked about yesterday getting KK back, big difference between this game and last game. I know it's a tough loss, but will you take kind of the improvement over last as a positive going into the next step?**

NIELE IVEY: Absolutely. I think the health of this team is



the only thing that matters to me, so the fact that we're healthier, the fact that KK is back -- she battled really tough injury this year, fought her way to get back with us, and she's a big piece of our success. She's a glue player for us. Our team trusts her. I have a ton of confidence in her.

And I think it was a plus that she was playing today versus Duke, but also going into the tournament, having her is better for our team.

**Q. Coach, how do you balance the fact that your team is playing its best basketball and you have a lot of momentum, and then also getting the recovery and being able to recharge during this next week? How do you balance those two things?**

NIELE IVEY: Right, well, they're going to get a couple days off. I think that's the biggest part. Like Hannah said, playing back to back to back, especially in these type of matchups, is really difficult. So credit to my performance team that got us ready every day to play. Those three, whatever days it is, they'll be fresh. We'll come back, we'll get back to work, get back to doing the same things that we've been doing to put us in this position.

I have a team that works really hard in practice, a great coaching staff. We'll get back to the fundamentals, watch film and then prepare.

**Q. Niele, how much pride comes for you in coaching a team where it kind of feels like the defining characteristic as of late has been this team just won't go away? How much pride comes with being the coach of that team that nobody really wants to face and is kind of a pest against everybody?**

NIELE IVEY: I love it. I love this group. Assembling this group in the off-season, having my core return with me, KK, Hannah, Cass, meant the world to me. So knowing I was bringing in a great group of grad transfers, assembling this team together, getting to work with this team, and then watching them grow from June until now has just been really rewarding for me.

I love working with them. I love the way they compete, wanting to get better. And I love that that is our identity is something that we talked about. We spoke on it this summer, and they put in the work to make that come to life because of their consistency of getting better and knowing that they needed to be a very defensive-minded team for us to be successful this season.

A credit to them and what they brought to this program.

**Q. For Hannah, you said numerous times this year**

**that every time you go out on the floor, you don't want to take it for granted, you want to give all that you have. To be able to do that throughout this run and even today in the loss, what are some things that you learned about yourself when you are just giving your all, not only just for yourself but for your team as well?**

HANNAH HIDALGO: I think I notice how resilient I am, and I think just the competitor in me wants to win. Then to be able to do it with this group of girls, it makes it so much easier. It doesn't even feel like I'm going as hard as I can when I'm doing it with these girls. They make it easy every time, just coming into practice or stepping onto the floor. It makes it easy to want to play hard for them.

**Q. Hannah, we saw you come out briefly there, maybe looked like something was bothering you. Was that just a breather? Are you all good physically? How big is this next week and a half, two weeks for you to just get right physically for the NCAA Tournament?**

HANNAH HIDALGO: Yeah, honestly, it was just a breather and I was only out for like 14 seconds. I've been playing 40 minutes for three games straight. It was a very long 14 seconds. But honestly just a breather that I needed. It'll be really important to just continue to take care of my body but also balancing it with still getting in the gym so that I'm not losing my stamina.

**Q. For Coach, it's the same result as last year with the semifinal loss to Duke, but it feels a little different. You played them a little tougher this time, could have won this game. What does it mean for you to be right there with the top seed in the ACC Tournament, things feeling a little bit different entering the NCAA Tournament this year?**

NIELE IVEY: Yeah, again, credit to this team. This team works. This team is a fighter. This team is resilient. And we had to put this new team together, and this is where we are at this point because of the work that they've put in.

So yeah, it's unfortunate, same result, but this group is a different group. Everybody that steps on that floor gives me their all on the offensive end and the defensive end. That's the difference. They play for each other. They love each other. That's the reason why you're seeing this type of team, but it's because of them. It's their character. It is their pride within this program of putting that jersey on, and I'm grateful.

**Q. I asked this same question of Coach Lawson. The feeling having two Black women compete at the ACC semifinal, just the pride that I felt, so can you speak to that?**



NIELE IVEY: I think every time I get a chance to step in front of my team knowing that I'm representing something bigger than myself, being a Black woman, it's not easy. You have to be twice as great. And I get a chance to represent a university that I love with a team that I love.

I hope that I'm inspiring my group. I hope that whatever they want to achieve outside of playing basketball, that they know they can do it because there's a woman of color in a leadership position that carries that weight.

I'm hoping that I can continue to inspire, and again, I'm just grateful and blessed to be able to stand up in front of my group and represent for Black women.

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