

Atlantic Coast Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 7, 2026

Duluth, Georgia, USA

Gas South Arena

North Carolina Tar Heels

Courtney Banghart

Indya Nivar

Elina Aarnisalo

Postgame Press Conference

Louisville 65, North Carolina 57

COURTNEY BANGHART: Hats off to Louisville. They get a chance to play for an ACC championship, clearly a spot we would have really liked to have had, but we didn't play well enough to earn it, quite honestly. We had just too many breakdowns and didn't quite have enough execution, which is uncharacteristic of us. But part of that was their pressure. We didn't handle that very well. Then part of it was some block outs and some ball screen coverages that we weren't as sharp as always.

It's March; you have to be sharp when the game calls for. We'll learn from it, as we have all year, learned and gotten better, so that we're ready to go in March.

Q. Courtney, Ciera had zero points today and then Nyla I think had six. What were you seeing from your post players today, and also, especially between that stretch between the third quarter and the fourth quarter when I think Elina was the only one to score?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, I think we're going to have to watch the film. We were just saying as a group we didn't get enough from the interior. Obviously their ball pressure took away our vision a little bit, but I'm not sure I love that we got into bodies enough for positioning in the interior. We just weren't physical enough down there pre-catch. But we'll have to watch the film because those are two really good players that we know we need more from in the low post, and we've had it all year.

We've got to get to the film there and watch it and make sure it doesn't happen again.



Q. Knowing today wasn't your best effort, how do you reset going into a new competition?

COURTNEY BANGHART: That's no problem. I mean, these guys live to compete. I don't know our record, but we won a lot of games. And we haven't lost a lot. I think we've won 12 of the last 14 or something like that. This is a group that's really been focused on continuing to get better.

Of all the things I'll make sure that we continue to progress. Their competitive spirit, their competitive character, that's definitely not it. They'll be maybe ready to go tomorrow if I let them practice.

Q. Coach, Coach Walz was in here a second ago saying he thought you were definitely a top-16 team for the NCAA tournament. Now that your resume is set, do you feel like you've done enough to earn a hosting bid for the first two rounds?

COURTNEY BANGHART: I mean, yeah. Every coach that stands up here is going to promote their team. But when you look at what we've done and in terms of how we scheduled, I mean, like if you look at -- isn't Kansas State still playing and have a lead here? Yeah, we beat them pretty handily, a neutral site.

If you look at the teams we've played as well as how much better this team has gotten, we've got really two upperclassmen in a uniform all year long. So we've said all along we're just going to keep getting better.

Like I said, we've won 12 of our last 14. We've had a lot of Quad 1 wins in that stretch. We've scheduled, so we've kind of done everything the committee has asked us to do. I don't think there's a team that if you look at from now, February and January, is playing better.

And Carmichael is a great place to host an NCAA Tournament game. We know that. We've done that well. We sell that place out.



If the committee does their job, I feel very confident.

Q. Coach, this question is for you. You talked about, hey, this is March. Can you describe what the gap is between ACC Tournament and then the NCAA Tournament, like what you require of your team there?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Well, obviously there's a chance for some of these guys to -- these guys have been going, right? We had, what, since we were at Virginia Tech, and then we had a home game and then at Virginia and then Duke at home, and then these games right in a row. They've been going.

But this is what they love to do. These are hoopers, right? What it actually looks like in terms of days on, days off is dependent upon our sport performance team and what that calls for.

But obviously, not knowing who we're going to play, we've got to sharpen up in a lot of areas, and I think all teams will do that.

All teams have different personalities, but I can they will you what I love about this team is they do get better, and they're committed to it. I get excited -- not that I'm going to do this today, guys -- but I get excited to plan practice. I get excited to work on things because it produces results for this group.

Give us two weeks to prepare, I feel good about it.

Q. Courtney, off of that, taking into consideration this run that you guys have been on, how do you contextualize a loss like that and what will be the message looking forward to the NCAA Tournament?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, well, the first thing we do is we always lean on the film. When you look at the two athletes next to me in terms of their competitive spirit and their preparation and their confidence and their swag, like, there's no questions there, right?

We didn't handle their perimeter pressure well. We didn't have any presence in the interior. There was lots of things statistically that we can work on. Obviously didn't shoot it very well, either.

So you take this game and it isn't any bigger or better than the one before it. It's just what's next, what's in front of us. Really, it's like that. So we've got two weeks.

So Indya is going to sharpen up the things we know are her strengths. We'll sharpen up the things that are Elina's strengths, because they're sitting right next to me. And

then schematically we'll make sure that we're ready. We've got to get a little bit better on our ball screen coverage based on today's performance, and we have film of us doing a good job of that.

Same thing with on the offensive end. I think Nyla is our leading scorer. I don't really look at the stats. I'm not 100 percent sure, but I think she's our leading scorer. And if so, we've had plenty of possessions where she's had the ball in the paint, and we just didn't do it today.

Not to ramble, but I feel really good about -- when you look at your team, as long as they know who they are and they continue to get better -- I've been doing this for a long time, I've had a lot of teams. And there's something really special about this group. They're well-led, they're deep, they're versatile, and they always get better.

So that's a team that I don't need to rah-rah them. It's like, these are the things we have to get better at.

You look at Indya and you just say, you've got me, and she's like, I got you. She'll make sure our team gets better in those areas.

Q. For the players, and particularly, you two are playing so well right now, what are the positives that you take going into March Madness?

INDYA NIVAR: I would say our connectedness and aggression, our belief in ourselves. Just carry that on into the March Madness. I feel like this loss is not going to take any belief that we have in ourselves out of us. I just know each and every time we lose, we always bounce back stronger and better. So I'm really excited about what's ahead.

ELINA AARNISALO: Yeah, I agree with her, what she said. The connectedness we have is actually incredible, and how we've got better every single game. We know we're going to bounce back, we're going to get better in a couple weeks.

COURTNEY BANGHART: I think what you're getting is the humility of these kids. What Indya is doing really well is -- I think she played the 1, the 2, the 3, the 4 today. Again, I don't look at her stats because I don't think of Indya as a stat guy. But six rebounds and 10 points and five steals. She just does so many things. Then she competes.

You look at E, and she's really gotten really aggressive. So she can score, she can handle the ball. She's starting to call offenses on her own. She's just grown so much. So that's probably what you're asking, but they don't like to talk about themselves.

I wouldn't be sitting in this position if I didn't have these two having leaned in the way they have this year. So that should be noted and in bold.

Q. For Indya and Elina, what was the feel of the offense between that third and fourth quarter, and was there any message that y'all kind of grouped together in between those quarters?

INDYA NIVAR: Nothing was easy. They played a really aggressive defense. And even though we broke the first line of defense, they had really big bigs on the second line. I just feel like we weren't getting into our rhythm and flow. We usually kick out for threes a lot, just didn't get into that today.

But we tried to shift our focus to defense because if we can get stops, we can kind of keep the game close if the offense is not on our side that day.

ELINA AARNISALO: Yeah, I feel like we didn't get to our flow, mainly because of our defense and rebounding. We love transition, and we started off the third quarter pretty well, got a wide-up lay-up for Indya in transition. Yeah, we just couldn't execute on defense that well today, so it really showed on our offensive side.

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