

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

North Carolina Tar Heels

Coach Courtney Banghart

Reniya Kelly

Indya Nivar

Women's Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the 2025 ACC Tipoff Q&A. I am happy to have UNC on the stage with me. Courtney Banghart going into her seventh year now.

COURTNEY BANGHART: Crazy.

THE MODERATOR: Reniya Kelly, as well as Indya Nivar.

Welcome. Five NCAA tournaments and two Sweet 16s in the last four years. Courtney, you returned eight players and six newcomers. With the eight returning players, how different might this team look this year, and what are some of the similarities we might see?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah. You know, we do expect to have a different look. You don't lose two of the best post players the league has seen in a long time and try to replace them immediately in the same way.

So we have some posts that need to step into that opportunity. They'll play the game a little differently. They can extend the floor a little more. They can allow us to play with a little more spacing.

Then we bring back a lot of experienced guards, talented guard play, as well as what we brought in both through the portal and freshmen in recruiting. We have a good guard group that has a lot of game pressure, whereas our inside game we've got to use our nonconference, which you see scheduled, to put them to the test early so we can get as much game pressure on our youth as we can as we prepare for the gauntlet of the ACC.

THE MODERATOR: Speaking of your schedule, nonconference consists of seven NCAA Tournament teams from a year ago, and why not? Let's just start off with South Carolina.

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: From what I looked at, you have three of last year's -- three of the four Final Four teams.

COURTNEY BANGHART: You bet. All on the road.

THE MODERATOR: Why make it easy? Was there a strategic plan with this schedule knowing what you had, or it's just, hey, let's play anybody and everybody?

COURTNEY BANGHART: It was pretty strategic. The ACC is so hard every year, and we knew that this was going to be a year where we were losing 60% or more of our productivity.

And so you would rather find out -- instead of finding out late, I want to find out early kind of what the traditional, sort of over the last year, were the best.

UCLA brought back a lot of their players. South Carolina brought back a lot of their players. Texas brought back a lot of their players.

We kind of are going to go against people that are really experienced and had a great year last year. I think that will bode well as we continue to persistently prepare for what's going to be the ACC gauntlet.

Q. This is for the players. Several of the teams that have been interviewed today have mentioned they want North Carolina this year. I just want to do get your thoughts on that.

RENIYA KELLY: That's good. We want everyone as well, so we're not running from any competition. We're trying to beat every team that comes in our way to get to the national championship, so that's always the goal every year.

Q. I think anyone who has followed this program for the past few years can see that you've been trying to build depth with your roster-building, and it has been a problem in the past. Do you feel like this group is the



group that, say, you're in a Sweet 16 game, you could go ten deep?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, I mean, in the past we've had incredible consistency, right? We've had reliability in that kind of top six or so; when you are healthy, top seven or eight.

This group has a little bit -- people that had are coming in that have more availability and what we're building now is reliability from those available players, right? The more reliable or available guys are, the deeper you are. Otherwise, you just have a lot of talent.

The only way we're going to do that, like we said, is with our non-conference schedule. Multiple mid-majors have won a tournament game in the NCAA Tournament. They're not just tournament teams. They're advancing in the tournament teams.

You know, these two have a lot of reliability. They're surrounded by a lot of talent, but we have a game that reliability, and the only way you can do that is with game pressure.

Q. You guys won against Duke in the Sweet 16 last year. What are some challenges that they presented to you guys this year, and then how do you guys plan to overcome them?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Duke is in February, right? I'll know a lot more about our team and a lot more about their team in February. We have great respect for what Duke is doing, what they've done, who they've been over their duration of their program. Elite defensively. They've got great length and speed. Well-coached.

You know, it's that rivalry that matters so much, internationally quite frankly. Like NC State. These are three teams that are three great examples, all three hosted an NCAA Tournament. They're great examples for women's basketball and the support that their communities give them.

I'll know more of the nuance whether we see who they have and who we have and how reliable our pieces become. Truthfully I don't know enough about that yet.

Q. You've lost a couple of key seniors last year. Who has stepped up in the key leadership roles?

COURTNEY BANGHART: We just finished our second week of kind of the 20 hours, and although we've had -- they've been on campus and in the summer we were training, we take our development inside our roster really

seriously. So we use a lot of time to develop the pieces so that they're better. The 20 hours starts the build towards competitive play.

There's a lot I still don't know. There's a lot we're still getting better at. From what we had in Week 1 to where we are in Week 2, I'm not sure I've seen more improvement week to week. That also means you have a long way to go, right?

This group has really shown that they can concentrate. They have competitive character and that they're connected. And these two have been a part of winning. They have a standard that they are bringing people to.

Yeah, it's been -- it's a really fun team to coach, because I just have more options, to Michael's point, than I've had before. It will be even more fun when five really step out and say we're the first group.

Q. Obviously big loss with Maria. What were the areas that prevented them from getting more playing time last season, other than Maria being there, and what growth did you see where they might be able to step into that role?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah. Sometimes it's less what the other group -- what they are or aren't doing as much as it is who is in that spot and what they are doing, right? You liken it to was it what Lanie Grant last year wasn't doing, or was it what Reniya and Indya were doing?

When you really come down to it, Alyssa and Maria were two of the elite post players in our league, so there was only so many minutes to be had.

And then there's also injuries. There's consistencies. There's concentration. There's all different things that freshmen are trying to navigate at an elite level and an elite pace.

Depending on what week we're talking about, I don't know where we were in that progression, but they'll have a lot more opportunity and they're more ready now than they were a year ago. That's our job.

THE MODERATOR: Indya, I know it's October, and I'm looking well into February. Last week when it was announced, and it speaks to the rivalry with Duke, that you guys were going to be on ABC, what did it mean to you and your teammates that we're going to be -- all eyes of America are going to be on this game because of what this rivalry is?

INDYA NIVAR: That rivalry means so much to us. For it to



be on national television, it doesn't make it even bigger. It's already really big for us to play in that game. Every time we play them, it's such a great competition.

Sometimes it's not fun, but you know, the competition is what we love. He with always love to come out on top. So that's what we hope to do.

THE MODERATOR: Much has been made about what you lost from last year; however, you do bring in six highly touted newcomers. Who has made the biggest impression on you so far?

RENIYA KELLY: Wow. Okay. Taliyah Henderson. She's a sleeper.

THE MODERATOR: Why?

RENIYA KELLY: She goes extremely hard every possession, every practice. Whatever it is, she's giving 110% every time. I think because she's a hard worker, I love players who just work hard every time, and she's a sleeper.

The first impression was great, and so I'm really excited to play with her more on the court.

THE MODERATOR: Indya, what about you?

INDYA NIVAR: I don't know. They all bring something different. Yeah, I would say Nyla Harris just because the leadership that she brings in. Her vocal leadership I really look up to. I think she just has a lot to contribute, a lot to show this coming year, and I'm glad she's here.

THE MODERATOR: Courtney, we've talked about this is year seven for you. You've been around a lot of these coaches in this league. What makes the coaches in this league so special?

COURTNEY BANGHART: That's a great question. I think one of the things is their consistency. When I look at across the power four, I look at our conference and there's just no one I'm, like, oh, thank God, it's that week when I get to play so and so, I need a break, or I need our guys to get a break. There's just no weak link, right?

Every league is going to have elite teams that are talked about and showcased and are carrying in some way, but we just don't have a weak link, and that's pretty remarkable in an 18-team conference. I love that part.

I think we all are authentically ourselves, and it fits the university in some unique way. I sort of belong at the University of North Carolina. That's just how it is. I think

that's been across the board when you think about the personalities of the schools and fan bases and teams, they are reflected in their coaches in a really cool way.

THE MODERATOR: For both of you, there's a lot of tradition in this conference. A lot of great players have passed through these gymnasiums. Is there someone you looked up to when you were young or maybe someone that you maybe try to emulate their game now?

INDYA NIVAR: For me I look up towards Jackie Young. Especially how she's playing right now in the Playoffs. Just playing on both sides of the ball, how versatile she is, how she cuts the pace, and how she's able to affect the game on multiple levels and is just a great playmaker as well.

RENIYA KELLY: I think for me I would say Skylar Diggins. I love how passionate she is about the game and her ability to score and just to be a net on defense. I love that. It's so different.

THE MODERATOR: Courtney, women's basketball has grown so much in the last three or four years.

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: We have a lot of new fans. What's that message to them beyond what took you so long?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Oh, man, I think one of them is, like, bring a friend, because I say this when I was building a fan base at Carolina. Just come once. Just do that, and then the rest will take care of itself. You've seen because you've called a handful of our games. It's like the place is on fire. It's hard to get a ticket. It's hard to get a seat.

I think that's true of women's basketball as a whole. Just give it a chance. Go to a W game. See if you like it. Bring a friend. That's been I think that people will be pleased. This is a really high level. These guys are playing at a really high level.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, you've played in your facility now when it is one of the loudest environments I've been in. I couldn't hear in my headset. What makes your facility so unique on game day?

RENIYA KELLY: Wow. Oh, okay. I would say the fans, actually. I think it's so many different people who come and watch us play, and they all use their voice in a unique way. I love our fans. We just be walking on Franklin and be, like, hey, oh, my gosh, you're the basketball team. It's such an engaged community, and I love that about Carmichael.

INDYA NIVAR: Yeah, I would have to piggyback off of Reniya. The support that they give us is on and off the court, from our donors to our students, to the people that we just meet from seeing them so often in the crowds.

They just make the environment something that, like, I love to play in.

COURTNEY BANGHART: I'll tell a story about that. There was a guy who came in. He's a new donor to our program, and he circled off of practice. He said, My wife and I got season tickets, and then she sort of fell ill with some Alzheimer's and started to not know who he was. He said it very genuinely, and he says, but she knew who Reniya Kelly was, right? I think that that sort of characterizes the fans.

They actually are rooting not just for Carolina. They are rooting for the success of the people that are wearing the jersey. I think that passion is felt.

THE MODERATOR: I had other questions, but I can't follow that. I'm going to ask all three of you this question. Indya, we'll start with you. When I ask this question, just a one-word answer. ACC women's basketball means what?

INDYA NIVAR: Legacy.

RENIYA KELLY: Excellence.

COURTNEY BANGHART: You're not going to believe me, but they took both of mine, which is awesome. That's how in line we are.

THE MODERATOR: That's teamwork.

COURTNEY BANGHART: That means we're doing something right. ACC basketball, it's a lot of things. I would say -- you said ACC basketball is? ACC basketball is unmatched.

THE MODERATOR: North Carolina, good luck this season, and thank you.

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