

Atlantic Coast Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 7, 2024

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

North Carolina Tar Heels

Coach Courtney Banghart

Deja Kelly

Alyssa Ustby

Postgame Press Conference



Miami 60, North Carolina 59

COURTNEY BANGHART: Thanks to Greensboro. They run a first-class event all the time. We feel like we're welcomed. I feel like they're excited we're here. Can't help but say that they invested in women's basketball when a lot of people weren't. Hats off to Greensboro for all you've done for us. Wish we could stay a little bit longer.

Shout-out to Miami. We know they're a great team in March. They played with a lot of urgency. They were able to really hurt us on the glass. I thought we did a good job with their initial attack, but couldn't get their second attack. And then couldn't make enough plays offensively. Couldn't make enough shots, couldn't make our teammates better when we didn't make our shots.

That's tough to overcome in March. Hats off to Miami. Wish them luck as they keep moving.

Q. The second-to-last play, did you try to set a screen for Lexi and the shot wasn't there so she made the pass inside?

COURTNEY BANGHART: You'll have to ask her.

Q. What was the play set up for?

COURTNEY BANGHART: It's a multiple. All of our sets are multiple reads. We trust our guys with the ball in their hands, so she has to make a quick decision. Deja had the ball and a quick decision in where the ball needs to go. Lexi was open, and then she's got it. Then the next guy got to make a good decision.

Her decision was to throw it in the post. It looked like -- I haven't asked her, but that wasn't a play that I would say would be in the category of a good decision based on the outcome.

Q. Watching tonight's game, it felt eerily similar to the game in Carmichael where you got a big first half lead and then Miami staged a comeback. What was different in the second half today that allowed them to complete that comeback?

COURTNEY BANGHART: It didn't feel the same to me at all. I thought the first game, we really throttled them most of them and they just made late threes that weren't contested and whatnot. This game, it was much more of a fight.

We had a bit of a lead, but these are -- in March, they're good teams. I'm sure you've watched the other games that have gone on. There's no oh, we're up 10, game over. That doesn't exist in March. This felt more like a heavyweight fight. Their team made more plays than we did, so we're the team going home.

Q. Anya Poole seemed to have a pretty solid first half, but then you went with Zelaya in the second half more. Were you trying to stretch the floor and get three-point shooting or what were your thoughts there?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, trying to get a little bit more spacing so Alyssa could have more space to work inside. We liked that matchup. So we kind of -- we've got a lot of posts, don't have quite as many guards right now, so we have to mix and match and play accordingly.

Q. Courtney and Deja, Deja has been one of the best in the country getting to the free-throw line, and just one free throw tonight. What do you think that was a product of?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Well, I'm not taking another fine.

DEJA KELLY: I won't, either.



Q. I'm not trying to bait you into taking a fine.

COURTNEY BANGHART: Good, because I can't be baited.

Q. Katie Meier talked about it as part of their strategy to keep her off the free-throw line. Was there something you saw in how she was defended that led to that?

COURTNEY BANGHART: No, I think Deja has got the best handle in college basketball and it's really hard to take it from her. What happens is she's really good at attacking hips. She's really good if you squeeze. Because she can get into her pull-up, you have to close the space, which gives her the advantage to attack hips. I don't think Deja played any differently on her point of attack, and I think probably I should leave it there.

DEJA KELLY: I don't think it was anything different. I thought that I'd just -- through whatever contact, I had to finish when I did get to the basket. As far as that goes, yeah.

Q. Alyssa or Deja or both, in the fourth quarter, I think there was a stretch of almost six minutes where you guys couldn't get a field goal, 0 for 9, and they went on an 11-1 run. What didn't work during that stretch? What wasn't working?

ALYSSA USTBY: I don't think it was necessarily that something wasn't working. I felt like we had really good shots, and we had the right people taking the right looks, and sometimes the ball just doesn't go in.

DEJA KELLY: I agree.

Q. How important is it to let this loss sting knowing that you still should have an NCAA Tournament berth?

DEJA KELLY: Yeah, I mean, it's frustrating. I feel like there's been a number of games like this that we've been in this year. The only thing we can really do is learn from it. But we just have to get out of kind of that same cycle. I feel like once again in this game, kind of everything that could have gone our way in those last 30 seconds did, and we just couldn't capitalize. But obviously that doesn't just matter in those 30 seconds, it matters for the duration of the game.

I think it's going to sting. It's going to -- but again, you've kind of seen these types of games all year. So we're just kind of going into March Madness with hopes of making it in, and we will, but we just have to learn how to break that cycle.

Q. Alyssa, you've played your heart out, many times being undersized. Going into the NCAAs, what can you learn from this? I know you're still processing, but playing against those taller post players.

ALYSSA USTBY: I think something that I can take away is just reminding myself that in order to be efficient, to get wins, to win the 50/50 balls, as detailed as that is, not only does it take talent, but it takes a lot of effort. So just trusting that, my combination of those two things.

And obviously rewatching the game, looking at film and seeing in what specific areas I can improve, just remembering to carry that mindset over. There's still some good things that came out of this game, and reminding ourselves of those as well as picking apart the things we can do better is going to be really important.

Q. Courtney, you weren't in a situation today where you were like a bubble team. You guys are going. You played a great schedule. What does the next 10 days look like where you don't know your next opponent but you know you have a game in front of you?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, well, it's been well told that we've got a few guys that can go. So part of it is how rested can I get these guys in body, mind, and spirit, because they've been going for a while. That's part of the challenge, right.

The second part of that is we know whoever we play is going to be good, and we have to play to our strengths. That's just a non-negotiable. We have to be able to move through and beyond our weaknesses. You're not going to over the course of a week change your identity. We shouldn't. It's why you've been invited to the tournament.

We just have to make sure that we go into it individually. I'd like to have some time with them individually in the gym so that Deja, Alyssa, Lexi -- go right down the line -- that they are at their individual best, and then really locked in to where are we when we are at our best, what are we doing, and then find a way to that. I hope that answers your question.

Q. Deja, you clearly have a great scoring ability. It didn't fall the whole time tonight. You started out with a couple of really big, really great shots. Teams can look for you to score in the NCAAs. Are you happy with your shot selection tonight? Did you see anything tonight where you're like, I'd like to do this better next time?

DEJA KELLY: Overall I liked my shots. I think there was

about two or three lay-ups that I should have made, but other than that, I had my pull-up. Obviously I'm going to have a defender right on me and none of my shots are going to be wide open. But overall I liked the shots I got.

I guess you could say it was one of those days. But I think the easy ones, those are the ones where I know I should have made, especially at the rim.

Q. Alyssa, in the last press conference Miami admitted that their plan was to kind of contain Deja in whatever capacity. How did you and the others on the court work to navigate that?

ALYSSA USTBY: Just our general job as teammates is to make each other better and to get each other open shots. Because just one-on-one basketball for any team is really tough to sustain and to play. That just is a part of sticking to our offensive game plan, moving the ball well, cutting hard. Just all those little details that add up to getting each other and Deja open shots.

Q. You guys went from 50 percent shooting in the first half to 23 in the second. Was that just shots not falling or something that Miami did differently?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Well, Katie said that we should check the basket because they struggled in the first half on that basket. Outside of that, the lay-ups and the missed threes and things, man, those are -- I thought they were good shots. Lexi took a wide-open three, missed it, and then we give up an and-one on the other end for a six-point swing. They all are guilty of that, not making shots they need to make.

That's what it comes down to in March, guys. You have to make plays within your skill set.

I thought the game was pretty consistently played, pretty consistently called throughout, good or bad. Not a ton of major adjustments because it was kind of that rock fight. That's what I would say. But these guys were in the game. They probably have more to say.

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