

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - North Carolina vs South Carolina

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Columbia, South Carolina, USA  
Colonial Life Arena

## North Carolina Tar Heels Head Coach Courtney Banghart Deja Kelly Alyssa Ustby

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Next up is North Carolina Tar Heels. Joined this afternoon by Head Coach Courtney Banghart and student-athletes Deja Kelly and Alyssa Ustby. Coach, if you would please make an opening statement.

COURTNEY BANGHART: We're thrilled to be here. It's hard to win in March, and these guys did it. They beat a very good Michigan State team. Had to play excellent defensively, and we did that. Took advantage of some opportunities on offense as well and had to play through some things. We didn't shoot the ball well. We didn't shoot the ball well from the free-throw line, but we kept on keeping on.

Super thrilled for this opportunity. We know we've got a great opponent in their gym in a place that really celebrates women's basketball.

I know this is two storied programs. We know this means a lot to a lot of people, so glad to be part of it.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. What do you all remember from the game in Chapel Hill? What are a few of the keywords that stand out about that matchup?**

ALYSSA USTBY: I think one of the first ones is competitive. I think South Carolina is a very good team, and they compete really hard. That's something that we like to do too. I think that's why we're a great matchup for



them.

DEJA KELLY: I think our defense kind of ignited our energy in that game. I think we ended up -- I think we out-rebounded them that game. Just from the jump I think the way we came out, we matched their intensity, we matched their aggressiveness.

So I think that's what kind of carried us through the game and obviously put a big fire under us too.

**Q. When I was talking to Maria yesterday she described tomorrow's matchup as a revenge game. How would you assess that energy heading into tomorrow, and how much is revenge a part of it?**

DEJA KELLY: I think it's great that Maria said that because obviously for us it is because we played them in the Sweet 16 two years ago. So this will be our second time playing them in March.

So in that way it is, but I think the biggest way for us to look at it is just the next game. I don't want to put a title to it. I don't want to make it seem bigger than it is, quote, unquote.

I think we just have to match the energy. We have to match the level that it's at, and we know it's March, so we know we have to bring our best. That's really what we're focused on.

ALYSSA USTBY: I would add onto what Deja was saying. I don't think it needs to be anything more than the next game in the March Madness tournament. They're obviously a great team. If we were playing any other team in the Round of 32, we would have just as much confidence and competitive energy poured into that matchup.

**Q. I am assuming you've seen South Carolina on film a little bit since yesterday and got to see them against Presbyterian. Are they different at all from when you saw them in March? If so, how?**

ALYSSA USTBY: I think they're pretty similar. I think what



makes South Carolina a great team is that they're really good at playing together and making good reads. That's where we have to buckle down on our fundamentals and how we play basketball.

Typically we describe that as playing connected, playing with each other, and starting our game strong on the defensive end because we know that carries over to our offensive. So as long as we take care of those principles, I think we have a really great game plan for them.

DEJA KELLY: I would agree. I think they're pretty similar. We know what their tendencies are. I think they're getting a little more from their bench, but other than that, I think we have our heads wrapped around kind of then and now.

**Q. You guys already mentioned this before, but this is the second time in three seasons you're meeting South Carolina with the season on the line. What does that kind of mean to you, and how does it impact your mentality?**

DEJA KELLY: I think just kind of what I was saying earlier. You're matching it like it's our next game in March Madness. Obviously it's fun to play a top team like that. They're a really good team, and it's obviously a great matchup, but so are we.

I think just being able to match it with that intensity and just being excited for the opportunity, I think that's what us seniors have to do is bring that energy to the locker room and just make sure that's carried through through the rest of our teammates. Knowing that this is a great opportunity for us and that we are fighting to move on, so...

ALYSSA USTBY: I think that's well said. Not much else to say.

**Q. For Alyssa, Dawn Staley described you as a nightmare matchup for her team. What's your reaction to that, and why do you think you match up so well against South Carolina?**

ALYSSA USTBY: I think I match up well in this game because I love to compete. They also like to do that as well. Any opportunity that I can get an advantage, whether it's a competitive advantage or something Xs- and Os-wise, I'm going to take it, and I'm not going to shy away from it. I respect her for saying that.

COURTNEY BANGHART: A matchup nightmare for a lot of people.

**Q. Kind of a similar question here. South Carolina has blown a lot of people out over the last three years, and**

**it hasn't been you guys. You guys have played them tough the two times you played them in the last three seasons. What is it about the challenge of facing a team like that that allows you guys to kind of rise to the challenge?**

ALYSSA USTBY: I think one thing that's special about our group is that we're going to meet the moment. So whatever that moment calls for, we have so many girls that are willing to step up and fill in those roles.

I think what makes this an awesome matchup is that neither team is going to back down, and you're going to get a really good fight. Just the result of that on the scoreboard is going to be a close game.

DEJA KELLY: I think that was well said too. I think it's just we're playing -- we're very competitive. I think we're playing with no fear. We know that it's a great opportunity, a great matchup. I think we treat it as such.

And, again, we match the level of intensity. We match the level of aggressiveness. I think you've seen that pretty consistent with this matchup over the past couple of years.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions now for Coach Banghart.

**Q. Courtney, what do you remember about the game in Chapel Hill? A lot of fouls. I believe South Carolina's whole frontline was in foul trouble in the first half. Was that a product of your defense, just how the game was officiated? What do you remember about that and how you hope to replicate it?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Just two really prideful and competitive teams. You know, we know that to handle their interior game is not easy, so we do that a bit by committee.

We've got some good length in those spots. I remember MiLaysia wasn't playing as much then. She's playing better now or playing more now, so she's added a nice element to their team.

We had three different point guards in that game play that are not dressed this game for tomorrow. We've got a little bit of a smaller rotation. They've got a little bit bigger rotation. So there's probably some story line in there as well.

At their place we knew that you just -- if you don't bring your best against the best, they're going to blow you out. That's just the nature of what happens in competitive athletics. As these guys alluded to, you have to meet

things with your best. We have every expectation that they'll continue to do that.

**Q. Do you have some kind of super secret, special South Carolina plan that's allowed you to do what a lot of teams have not been able to do the last few years?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: I don't think so. I'm so focused on each team, and I find it intriguing the uniqueness of every team. In preparing for South Carolina it's totally different than preparing for Michigan State.

So I kind of get really in the weeds on those things. Part of South Carolina's brilliance is, as these guys have said, how competitive they are across the roster. If you have some weak links competitively, you're going to get blown out. It's just a thing.

I think part of it is we've recruited really competitive kids that meet that moment. We were able to get out in transition a bit. We were able to run because if they're going to be big, they're not -- it's pretty hard to be big and fast. That will be a key part of the game as well.

We're going to have to -- at their place -- or I guess it was in Greensboro two years ago, that was a possession game. We just ran. We just took it right to them.

I think the level of competitiveness is elite, and I think we talk a lot about South Carolina's size and roster and their depth. I don't think people talk enough about how competitive they are and right through their whole roster. Fortunately, I think we have the same type of team.

**Q. Teonni had a great game yesterday. Didn't get to play against South Carolina in November, not on the Sweet 16 in '22 either. With South Carolina's size, how important will that post depth and her be for y'all?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Absolutely, and she can run. Indya only played about two minutes in that game as well, and Indya started for us yesterday. We've had to sort of change and evolve.

Teonni wasn't cleared the last time we played them. She missed most of the nonconference with an injury. Her season is upwards trajectory. Thankfully the longer the season goes, the more she has an upwards trajectory.

Yeah, we expect to need her and need her to play well. The physicality of the moment, it's important that she grasps it quickly.

Then same thing with Indya. Indya was still kind of learning and working through her stuff and her transfer

process, and she's much more confident and settled. So they'll have to have key roles in the game for sure.

**Q. Piggybacking off of that, how else have you seen this team change since playing South Carolina at the beginning of the season?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: We've changed multiple times, right? That's part of it. The position that's the hardest one to sort of lose is your point guard because you play to the personality of who has the ball in their hands a lot.

Deja is the fourth person we've played there, so our team has changed dramatically four times and had strengths and weaknesses through that. Really proud of them yesterday that they played to their strengths, our own individual strengths.

We didn't shoot it well or take care of some of the situations well. We're different. I thought Kayla was running the point at that time, so we had a lot of speed. She gets the ball out quickly. Alyssa was playing a lot at the four. Alyssa is playing a lot at the three now when we're big.

We're a little bit different. Maybe we're a lot a bit different. It's the things that we were talking about that really matter when you play South Carolina. You need competitiveness right on down the roster. You need toughness. You need to play to your strengths up and down the roster.

Those things are standards for us. So I'm comfortable with that being our reality.

**Q. You said yesterday you were going to take a deeper dive into South Carolina.**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, I've taken it.

**Q. What have you seen out of Paopao and her ability, her consistency from the outside? It's something South Carolina really hasn't always had at times during this run.**

COURTNEY BANGHART: She's shooting almost 65 percent off the dribble behind ball screens. It's the best in the country. If she shot more, she would score more. She's a highly efficient shooter.

I don't know what her actual percentages are because we kind of get in the weeds on where those are coming from. When you are talking ball screen, shooting behind ball screens, that kid is lights-out and has been all year long against high-level competition.

She picks her spots. She fits into them because she also -- they want to play an interior offense, and she's willing to do that. Yet, if you spend too much time worrying about the inside, then she's also going to catch and shoot. She's just a key part of -- she was a key add for them and makes them super hard to guard, and her playing well in that second half is kind of what -- especially in that fourth quarter there at our place -- kind of broke our back a bit.

Really good player. Super experienced. She does it so effortlessly you wonder if she's playing hard, and then when you watch the film back, she's playing hard. It just looks effortless.

**Q. You mentioned yesterday that it's common in this part of the season to be battling fatigue, especially you guys having a limited bench. How are you hoping the team will cope with that tomorrow, and what are you telling them to get them through that?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: I told them I would call a time-out with four minutes into the third quarter so that they got that long time-out followed by the other long time-out. I told them to pull on their shirt and tell me when they have to come out. I was not expecting Maria and Alyssa to do it at the same time. That was a bummer.

You know, you saw the pace of play in the first half versus the second half for us. It's hard to ask them to play at that pace for 40 minutes. I would love to sit up here and tell you we can do it, but it's really hard to do. It's a physical game too.

So their deep bench gives them a higher margin of error for sure. Our not deep bench gives us a much smaller margin of error. That's why you throw the ball out. You don't win games on stat sheets. You win games on how you play inside the lines. So we'll have to understand.

We know who we are. We have a small margin of error. So our pieces that are in have to play really well and they have to play hard and we have to play through some things, fatigue, and foul trouble and things that are part of what we are as the hand were dealt right now.

But we've won a whole lot of basketball games against really, really good teams being who we are, so we're just going to keep doing that.

**Q. Courtney, everybody has to be seeded somewhere in this tournament. Do you like facing somebody you already faced? If you guys advance, Notre Dame is going to be in Albany or playing to be in Albany. You've seen them before. Do you like those kind of rematches in a postseason at tournament time?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: I think the ACC you sign on for that because there's so many good teams in the ACC. I would imagine most champions have had to play a conference team if you're in a power conference at least once in their journey.

I don't love it for the first two rounds because there's so many good teams out there. So to have an opportunity -- I know Duke played Richmond. They already played them this year. You kind of want to play teams that you don't schedule a ton. There's enough good teams that you could do that.

So I'm thrilled to be playing South Carolina because I have a lot of respect for their program, and it's close for our fans to get to and all of that, but from a pure basketball standpoint, I think it was a miss. I think for us to have an opportunity to play a Tennessee or a -- I don't know who else is on one seed lines or what not, but we played this game in November. This game has been played, right?

I don't know. If we hadn't played Iowa yet, that would have been neat. We haven't played UCLA. We scrimmaged them. Or we haven't played USC, you know. So I don't know if it's for a story line. I don't know. But, yeah, I don't think it's great for the game.

We scheduled this game. I could schedule this next year too, right? It's harder for me to schedule USC. It's hard to get to.

I would think most coaches are going to want to play different opponents than they schedule and then when you get past the Sweet 16, it's hard to do that because it depends on who beats who.

**Q. So you are going to play South Carolina next year?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: I don't know. The SEC Challenge did it this past year. We scrimmaged them each of the last two years, so I don't know. That's partly my job, but not today. Not today. I'm not going to worry about that today.

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