

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - North Carolina vs West Virginia

Monday, March 24, 2025

Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA

Carmichael Arena

North Carolina Tar Heels

Courtney Banghart

Indya Nivar

Alyssa Ustby

Media Conference

North Carolina - 58, West Virginia - 47

THE MODERATOR: We've got North Carolina here. We'll start with a statement from Head Coach Courtney Banghart.

COURTNEY BANGHART: Man, I just am over filled with pride for this group. If you think about what Carmichael looked like tonight and how many people have wrapped their arms around this team and willed us to wherever we need to be.

Carmichael is a great place to host. Our kids earned it, and they showed up for us. That was one of the better environments that I think anyone's ever played in or, from my case, coached in. That's a night I will remember for a long time, how many people just have wrapped their arms around these guys, and they deserve it.

I'll be honest, that's a really good team, as you all know. There's no bad teams in March, unfortunately. I was tired of hearing about their defense. I was tired of hearing about their defense. Not because it's not one of the best defenses in the country, but why was no one talking about our defense? Right? These guys can defend. They've done it all year long.

We knew exactly how we were going to defend them. I know those of you that have followed us know that's no surprise how we defended them tonight. So I think us hearing about their defense allowed us to sort of say, okay, we're going to show, and we're going to prove it.

These two sitting next to me, grateful they chose Carolina



and how they've represented us. Alyssa, thank you. Thank you for how you've handled your career, how you've worn Carolina on your chest, and who you've brought along with you.

I know people are going to talk about that being your legacy game, and you deserve everything you felt tonight. It's a joy to coach you. You've made me better. You've allowed me to get better players here as well. And you doing things the right way show that that's enough always. So thanks for choosing Carolina.

Q. Indya, this one's for you. You guys had that run at the end of the third quarter. You kind of closed it out you had the sequence with you blocked the shot, ran the court, and then you got the layup to end the quarter. Just take me through that sequence a little bit. What do you remember about what you were seeing in that play? Also, how much did that third quarter run spark you guys for the rest of the game?

INDYA NIVAR: I think our preparation prepared us for that moment. We knew they were going to fight back. So we just know we had to match their toughness.

That end of the third quarter, we were just staying with our principles. We stayed disciplined. I was put in a great position to get that block, and Lexi passed it up for me to the layup.

We were really focused this game. We really wanted it for our seniors because we didn't get it done on Senior Night. We wanted to end tonight with a win for them.

Q. Congratulations on the great win. Alyssa, your determination is amazing every game, but tonight I saw it in all the players. If you all could both speak to what you all said as leaders and captains to be able to get the team so focused tonight.

ALYSSA USTBY: I think Indya kind of talked about it a little bit there. Losing on Senior Night is tough, and not knowing if we would for sure be able to secure a hosting spot, that's what's been kind of driving us since that Senior Night.



We just had a lot of fire. We are really excited. We love playing with each other. We want to keep playing, and we want to keep the season going. So there's not anything that's going to stop us. We're going to keep being determined and locking into our game plan and making sure that we can come out with these wins.

INDYA NIVAR: I think this group means a lot to all of us. Like our connectedness, it's a lot on and off the court. I feel like our chemistry is really great, and we just wanted to fight to play again because we love each other and we wanted to get another opportunity to play another game.

Q. Indya, North Carolina girl, Duke waiting in the next round, North Carolina State already making their way through as well. Seeing where women's basketball is in this state and being such an integral part of that, how does that feel? And how excited are you for that Sweet 16 game?

INDYA NIVAR: Oh, yeah, the Triangle is a hoop state. North Carolina is a hoop state. I think it just shows that all three schools making it to this next round.

It's really exciting to be in my hometown. A lot of people get to come to my games, which I didn't have my freshman year. But having that support has really helped me along my journey here.

Q. Alyssa, can you kind of comment back on what Coach Banghart said about your legacy here at Carolina? Also, Indya, can you kind of talk about what Alyssa has done for you and for the team as a whole? Just kind of to be a leader for this team.

ALYSSA USTBY: Just coming, my decision to come to Carolina, I felt like Coach Banghart stuck her neck out for me because I wasn't in the ESPN Top 100 and I was bringing our class rank down. She trusted me, and I knew that would take us a long way. I would do so much for this program, and I'd run through a brick wall, which I hope I've shown over my career here for five years.

I'm just super grateful for her for having that trust in me, continuing to invest in me, challenging me to get better, and then just continuing to recruit great kids.

I'm so glad that Indya came back to UNC, and we have so many great girls on this team that make the experience enjoyable, and they continue to fill me with joy. This last season has been my most enjoyable season because of the people that are here on this team.

Q. Indya, your thoughts on Alyssa?

ALYSSA USTBY: I could go on a whole rant about Alyssa, but she embodies the Carolina culture. She sets our standard, and she demands the best of everybody around her. She makes everybody around her better. I'm going to miss her so much.

Even on my down days, Alyssa picks us up because she never has a bad day, which is surprising, but that's just her. She's a dog. She always works hard, and it's just an inspiration to everybody on this team.

Q. Alyssa, your freshman year here, there were no fans in the stands. Your last game here, you heard what your head coach said about the environment. What did it mean to you just on your personal journey to see the arena loud, rowdy pretty much all night really supporting you guys toward this win?

ALYSSA USTBY: It is such, such a special feeling. Again, just to see the growth over the years, I think that's just a testament to what Coach Banghart is building here. I'm just so glad I was able to be a part of it and give everything I could to it to leave it off better than we found it. And we've been doing a great job so far.

I think the community that is here to support us is committed to the players that are on our team. They love our team so much because we have built a relationship with them, and we continue to thank our fans and make that connection.

So it feels like a family environment, and I bet it's a really tough place to play when teams come in here and try to get the smoke with us because we have an incredible fan base and our players are really fun to cheer for.

Q. Alyssa, I saw you jump up on the scorers table. When the players all walk off the floor too, you're the last one sort of waving to the fans and stuff. Can you just kind of walk me through the thoughts and emotions of not only the excitement of jumping on the table, but then walking off the last time as a player?

ALYSSA USTBY: I've always wanted to jump on a table, on a scorers table before, and I was like this is just set up to be the perfect moment, and I have to go for it.

It took a little bit of courage because I was like should I do it? I asked my assistant coach, Coach Jo, like should I do it? She was like, without a doubt, no question. That was so much fun. I loved it.

Again, that was like a reaction or a chance for me to like hype up the fans and kind of celebrate them too because



they've been a part of my journey for so long and have trusted me as a player to develop over my years because I didn't come in as like a star athlete or a star player. So they've just trusted me along this journey.

Then walking off the court and just giving one last good-bye, taking a good look around because I know that's a moment that I'm going to cherish for so long. I am really sad that was our last -- my last game in Carmichael, but overjoyed at what's ahead.

Q. Indya, their leading scorer was held to single digits for the first time this season, season low. What did you and Lexi and Reniya do to hold her down?

INDYA NIVAR: All year we focused on our defense, and we knew our defense was one of the best in the country. That's because we have everybody on our team takes accountability to stop people on the other team, stop them from their favorite moves and stuff.

It wasn't a one person job at all. I think we all bought into being in the gaps and helping one another and not having anybody on an island because it was going to take everybody to defend their really good guards.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach Banghart.

Q. Coach, I know sometimes when the brackets come out, you want to just focus on the one game ahead. It's also human nature to sort of, hey, this might happen. Now it's here. You're going to play Duke in the Sweet 16. What are the emotions like kind of going into that and setting up such a monumental matchup on a monumental stage?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, and how fun if we weren't because I think these three North Carolina schools could go even further. Now of course one won't advance.

As I told our guys in the locker room just now is that these moments are so hard. They're hard to get to. I remember all the hard times, and I'm still living them, right?

It sounds like coach speak, but I told them in the locker room we're going to enjoy this one because I know how I'm wired, and tomorrow morning I'll be right back in my zone. So super cool for this area. Super cool for our state. Again, a disappointment that someone's got to lose that game because the ACC will have one less team advance, but I'll have more thoughts on that as we get closer to the game.

Tonight I'm just two Sweet 16s in four years and this team making it this way and hosting in front of their own home

crowd, and people showed up for them both nights. If I don't take that in, I'm not going to last long in this business.

Q. I want to talk about the strategy with the point guards, your development of three point guards -- Grant, Townsend, and Kelly -- to take on West Virginia. Could you speak to your trust and development in them.

COURTNEY BANGHART: Absolutely. I think it's the one position you really can't play basketball without. No offense to any of the other positions, but the person who can handle the ball while also running tempo for a team is critical.

Knowing that we had Reniya, and I trusted her from the very beginning. I always trust my recruiting. Just like Alyssa said, I didn't need ESPN to tell me she was good enough or wasn't good enough, I watched her with my own two eyes. Reniya, you might remember, started here as a freshman. I trusted her.

Grace, when she went in the portal, I was the first coach to call her. You can say all the things -- some people might say, oh, she's too short or she never played Power 5. Again, trust your eyes. That's a kid I knew could help us. And she plays the game so different than Reniya. I didn't want her to try to be Reniya. I wanted her to be her best self. She's a tempo creator, and I thought she's really throughout the season settled into that.

And Lanie, you can see how special she's going to be and needs to continue to have time to marinate how she's playing throughout the games. She's giving us a ton of versatility there, and she'll play the 1 even more differently than the other two.

But I like all the options there, and we'll continue to develop them.

Q. Awesome moment at the end of that game. When you guys were coming off the court and all the practice boys were lined up. You come in there, and you're like in the mosh pit in the middle of them and invite them into the locker room. What do they mean to this team, and also how important are they in preparing this team for the press you guys faced today?

COURTNEY BANGHART: I mean, everything. They come at 9:00 a.m. in the morning on Saturdays. I told them I was bummed out the game might be in the middle of the day, and they're like, well, we'll just miss class. We're not missing it. These are like their sisters, and they're like our brothers.



They've been as much of my journey as my own team is because they're with me all the time. I got onto the fellows group chat, and they're with this team whether we're home or away. I can yell at them if they're not doing what I'm asking them to do. They watch film to know how they're going to have to play.

These guys were pressing for the last two days, like everywhere on the court, and they just did it. Sometimes I go to the next thing and they don't even get water. They're like, we're fine. Keep going. Every team has scout guys, but I'd put mine up against anyone in the country.

Q. Coach, you guys fouled out two post players, almost a guard JJ Quinerly. Can you kind of talk about the approach in your toughness and how you approach the post and help them kind of get out of that situation?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Maria does a really good job of that on her own. She drew five fouls. We actually decided late in the third, middle of the third there to put Alyssa at the 5 because they were not as mobile given their foul trouble. So you probably saw we ran a bunch of isos on different spots on the floor so she could attack hips.

Even that late inbound, we ran the same inbound all three times. All three times, I just said attack a hip, attack a hip.

When Alyssa can defensively play the 5, it's a real advantage for us on the offensive end. Again, we just needed to attack hips. You can't play a press team -- I don't want to break their press and break their defense. We wanted to be aggressive all night, and that's different than how we had to play against Oregon State.

Q. There was a moment fairly early in the fourth quarter where Alyssa got a block, ran back for a fast break. They called a timeout. You showed a little more emotion than you usually do on the sidelines. There was a stomp. There was a yell. What was going through your mind at that point? Did you feel like you had it?

COURTNEY BANGHART: When my guys are aggressive, we're really hard to beat. Obviously with the time and score and how well we were defending as the lead was extended, I just didn't think they were all of a sudden going to score a ton of points on us, right?

And how much we love these guys, I wanted it so bad for them, and I wanted it so bad for the community that wanted us to host and helped us get there.

So I think that was real. That feeling was real. I was just

so joyed for them, and watching how they came together starting in June and all of them have their own journeys and we're right there with them, it was just so rewarding.

I do, I try to keep focused on what needs to happen next, but in that moment, I was just overjoyed for them.

Q. Two quick questions. One, you look like you were shivering. Was it a massive water dump there?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Cold water too. It's interesting because on the way to shootaround this morning, someone handed me a water from an ice tub, and I said, do you think the population prefers room temperature water or cold temperature? We had a big debate about it. I'm on record that I think people would prefer room temperature water.

That's not what got poured on me. It was marinating all day, so I'm freezing.

Q. In the last 11 minutes, they had one field goal. Was that the best defensive stretch considering the competition that you've had all season? And how did you do it?

COURTNEY BANGHART: I thought we defended Ta'Niya Latson really well in the ACC Tournament as well. So it's hard to pick from the two. We knew that we needed to stop her initial attack chest to the ball. And then we knew she can snake you back. So your gap is actually sometimes the one that, as she goes away from you, you've got to follow her.

So there were some tactical things that our guys just totally -- we said no islands, no islands, no islands, and our guys were really shifty, and we really tried to clog up. We wanted to be high at the point of ball screens. We really wanted her to play in a crowd and all night, like we did Latson, and our guys have done a good job of that both times we've asked.

Q. You coached against a Mark Kellogg coached team in 2022 with Stephen F. Austin out in Tucson. Was there anything tactically or strategically that you took from that game to prepare for this one?

COURTNEY BANGHART: No, just that he's a really good coach and has really good teams. He ran more of a five out at SFA. They still pressed a lot, but he had that international kid that was a bear to guard, but more so because she was a stretch shooter and could stretch you out.

This team is totally different because they've got some of

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

the more dynamic guards that we've seen. Thankfully the ACC has prepared us for that. Totally different game plans in those ways.

To go to a Sweet 16, I was watching games all day, and it's just hard. There's so many good teams. Not a lot of takeaways. Well defended tonight by a team that never got talked about how good our defense was.

Q. A year ago today I was in a press conference with you after a really tough game, after a really tough finish to a season. I was just kind of wondering what you make of sort of the journey in the past year, especially of the players that got through that adverse situation, battled through it, and now you're here and you're hosting and now you're going to the Sweet 16. Just a lot of players are still here that were on the court that day.

COURTNEY BANGHART: For sure.

Q. Just what you make of their perseverance through all that?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Well said, perseverance. When I got with Alyssa after the season, I said, here's the deal. You have to add another layer to your game, and I'm here for you. But you have earned the right to make the decisions that are right for you. Don't worry about me. She right away was like I want you to help me keep getting better.

I said, but I also want to make sure that you trust us that we can host in the NCAA Tournament. We can do that. She said, that's why I'm coming back.

Indya's journey, who has a much bigger role this year. Maria had made major strides. Reniya made major strides. It validates the work because people don't see the 8:00 a.m. in this gym. I feel like I live in this gym. They don't see the 8:00 to 9:00, 9:00 to 10:00, where you're just working on their own skill set, and sometimes you're just talking to them about like, hey, where are you in this moment? How are you in this moment?

Then of course you come back in the afternoon and have your team practice. It's just so rewarding when their journey turns out that they -- as I told them, you deserve it. It doesn't mean that you're going to get it. You've got to go earn it. And they were able to earn it in a 40-minute game. It all came down to that.

Q. You wanted to host for so long. How did it compare?

COURTNEY BANGHART: It was even better. Thank you for asking. When I was at Princeton, someone said I'd been to like 13 of the last 18 tournaments. I'm telling you it's way better when you're hosting. Way better.

Then of course I wanted it so much that you're like, oh, God, what if it's not as awesome as I hoped for? Sort of like when I told the Carolina team, we've got to get to the NCAA Tournament. There's nothing like it because they hadn't been, of the group that I had. And then it was COVID. And I was like, I promise it's usually way better than this.

I was so hopeful we'd host it, and then when we did, I thought, imagine if it's not all that we wanted. It was more. It really was more. We've had great crowds here over the last two years or so, three years. This one felt different, as did whatever night the last game was. It just felt different.

Maybe it's me, or maybe it's recognizing that people, they willed us here, we got here, and they showed up again, and they were loud. And they wanted it as much as our guys did. So it was even better than I could have hoped for.

THE MODERATOR: Room temperature water?

COURTNEY BANGHART: You do cold water? You just gave me room temperature water. Guys, room temperature water or ice water? Let's do a straw poll. Yeah, it's a lot of people.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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