

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

Monday, October 5, 2026

Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

North Carolina Tar Heels

Coach Courtney Banghart

Nyla Brooks

Achol Akot

Women's Press Conference



worked on this offseason.

THE MODERATOR: Achol Akot, transferring in from Oklahoma State where you were honorable mention All-BigXII. You were one of the most efficient scorers in the nation a year ago shooting just over 63%. Describe your game to the fans of the ACC.

ACHOL AKOT: I think my defense drives my offense, so I start on the defensive end. Usually when I have a great defensive game, I have a good offensive game.

Offensively I think I'm a long guard. I can score downhill on both sides, both hands, and put pressure at the rim. I'm very fast. I love transition, and defensively I can guard one through five.

Q. What is your message to the fans coming into cheer for the season?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, we work hard to build a product that you're going to enjoy, and I've been doing this a long time. I've been a head coach, I think this is my 20th year doing it. There's a lot to love about this team in terms of its pieces that were put together and the way that they were put together.

I feel really fortunate. We've had 68 training sessions already and watching them is a joy in the way that they can play. So Carmichael has become a really special place to play. We have an incredible home schedule in terms of some of the best teams in the country coming to our place, and we want them to continue to make it the sixth man.

To get three league transfers from inside the ACC, it shows you that people like playing in Carmichael. They just want to play with us, not against us. I want our fans to continue to help make it a great environment.

Q. Courtney, last season you had three top-5 opponents by early December, and you were competitive in all three. You've got another gauntlet nonconference schedule. What did you learn from last year through that, and what are the challenges when every year you're dealing with a lot of transition?

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the 2026 ACC Tip Off Q&A. I am happy to welcome University of North Carolina to the stage. Tar Heels are coming off an 8-8 season, 14-4 in the ACC, good for second, and accomplished your third consecutive Sweet 16.

UNC returns eight players that will join four transfers and two freshmen. Courtney, what will this team look like, and what was the emphasis this offseason to take that next step?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Excited about this group. We felt like we've had some really sustained success, and we feel like we're ready to take another step on that climb. Knew we needed to get more physical. We needed to get a little bit bigger at the guard spot. We needed to get a little bit faster in order to do that.

So obviously with Kate Harpring coming in and also throwing in the transfers, it had to fit that. And then we really challenged people like Brooks who was an All-ACC rookie last year, she had to get better too.

And so I give the returners a lot of credit. They brought in the exact kids we wanted, both in the high school and in the transfer portal. We're bigger. We're faster. We're more athletic. We're more dynamic than we were a year ago.

THE MODERATOR: Nyla Brooks, great success as a freshman a year ago. What was your greatest focus this offseason in preparation for year two?

NYLA BROOKS: My greatest focus was just keep getting better. Just building off the things I already been doing, being consistent at what I do, working on my left hand getting stronger. Those were a few of the things that I



COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah. You know, I think scheduling tells you a lot about how you feel about your team, right? Or how you personally are preparing them.

In our case, you know, our goals are to advance as far as possible and get all the way to that last weekend of the NCAA Tournament, so we've got to get the standard quickly.

We've got to be against the other people that are in that same climb and so that we have a true comparison so it's not just how are we playing against our opponents and how are they playing against theirs and you try to guess.

We just want to take it right to the fight. So I think that gives us a good barometer early as we continue to build on our climb.

So, yeah, I love it. I also have a lot of faith in our group. To beat them, you have to actually go out over 94 feet and beat them. We're preparing to do that.

THE MODERATOR: Courtney, speaking of the season, you kick off in Paris against Oklahoma. Then you come here to Charlotte to play in the Spectrum Center against South Carolina. You also face off against NCAA Tournament teams in Alabama and Texas Tech in the WBCA Showcase as well as you host LSU.

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, all that.

THE MODERATOR: All that before ACC play. What's the balancing act? You just said it tells you a lot about how you feel about your team, but that's a gauntlet.

COURTNEY BANGHART: That's a gauntlet, yeah, it is. You have to let the noise be just the noise of people that aren't scheduling so hard, right? So then their records are 13-1 going into the league, right? So you have to sort of -- you have to trust. I think we're at the point now where our voters are actually watching. They're not just voting. So they're going to reward the eye test also, right?

But you have to sort of leave the noise out of like that team is 14-0 and just like, they didn't play anybody, right?

Yeah, I just think for Brooks and Achol as they stand right next to me here, they need to see where their block-out is, where their one v. one defense is, where their ability to attack a close-out is against the best out there so if we have to make that adjustment, we're making it now. We're not making it, you know, in the offseason.

I think it's just a really valuable thing. We get invited to a

lot of these showcasy things that come with it. Some hoopla, which I'm obviously really proud of.

Q. The Triangle Rivalries, amazing. Tough for you. But can you please speak to the benefits to your program and the ACC having Duke State and Carolina's great programs?

COURTNEY BANGHART: It's the best. It's the best. Playing at an institution where within 30 minutes you have two of the very best programs in the country that you have an opportunity for. Our fan base can count on it, right? Duke, NC State, and Carolina can count on their teams being good and for those arenas to be full.

In the world of constant change in college athletics, those three things are sure, right? You find them on the calendar. You circle them and say, "I'll see you there."

So how great for our state, how great for our region, how great for our players, how great for our coaches.

I mean, it's one of the great things about the ACC and really unique to all of college basketball is this triangle.

Q. This is for the players. How has the team grown in the offseason both individually and collectively?

NYLA BROOKS: The team has grown tremendously. I feel like coming in we have almost a whole new team. We have a lot of transfers coming in, freshmen kids coming in. Noelle is getting in the mix of everything.

We did a lot in the offseason to prepare for what you will see this season coming up. Yeah, this team bonded. That chemistry off the court is important as well. The locker room is right, I feel like on the court it's going to resemble that as well.

So being on the court, learning together, learning new things -- a lot of people came here, so we had to learn a lot coming in.

I think our team bond, our chemistry is going to be there for sure when we start the season.

ACHOL AKOT: For me, I think there's three different changes that's going on definitely with the transfers. New environment, new team, new structure. Just getting adjusted to that. Freshmen, the pace of college. Just getting adjusted to that.

Then the returners, how to get better, how to not just stay stagnant and elevate for this next season. It.



THE MODERATOR: Achol, I want to piggyback on that. Which of these newcomers -- and obviously you're one of them, so feel free to speak on yourself -- has impressed you the most and you think come ACC play especially, everybody is going to be talking about?

ACHOL AKOT: I think a lot of people need to look out for Sophie. Sophie has grown in the paint actually. I think just going to battle in the paint, developing that aspect. I know everyone knows her as a shooter, but just expanding her game and getting better at that every single day has really helped her. So watch out for Sophie, definitely.

THE MODERATOR: Nyla, I'm going to flip it. Which of the returners has elevated their game the most this offseason?

NYLA BROOKS: I will say Blanca. She'll be a key. She'll be key for us this year. Y'all will see that, for sure. Y'all didn't see her much last year, but this year she a dog. Just watch out were for sure.

ACHOL AKOT: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Courtney, there's a question talking about the ACC and how special it is. You've had great success in your eight seasons in the league. What are the fundamental elements that you think a team has to have to have success in this league?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, a lot of everything, literally. It is such a challenging league. I'm not sure we always get the national respect. We had five in the Sweet 16 again this past year. This is a tough league.

You need a lot of everything. You can't just have elite guard play. You can't just have versatile posts. You can't just be able to play fast. You have to be able to play smart. You have to be able to be physical. You have to be able to have sustained competitiveness. You have to have elite talent at all spots. I mean, you have to be well-prepared from a coaching staff standpoint.

These (indiscernible) can coach now. It is -- you need a lot of a lot. It inspires me in the recruiting process through the portal and the high school and the international space because have you to bring dogs that are in for the fight, and we've got that, which I'm excited about.

Q. Nyla, I had the opportunity to call a couple of your games a year ago, and it was really interesting to watch your interactions with Courtney.

NYLA BROOKS: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Tell us why. They were positive.

There were some freshmen moments too, but they were positive. Tell us why, what makes it so special, to play for Courtney Banghart?

NYLA BROOKS: Yeah, this is my dog. I mean, I could come in her office, talk to her about anything. I mean, she's available. If I text her, she's one text away. Go to her house, pull up, if I need to talk to her, boom, I can do that.

No, I feel like it all started in the recruitment process as well. She recruited me to come here. We talked. I know she wanted me to make an impact, and that's what I did. I came on the court and delivered that.

She gave me the opportunity to do that, so I feel like trust is a big thing as well with her. So building that trust off the court as well gave me a lot of justice last year, and I appreciate her for giving me the opportunity to do that.

COURTNEY BANGHART: She's my dog too. She's my big dog. Well, I don't know about that.

THE MODERATOR: This question is for each of you. Achol, I'll start with you. When I ask for a one-word description of North Carolina women's basketball this season, what is it?

ACHOL AKOT: That's a hard question. Okay. Resilient. I think our offseason or preseason schedule is going to show us a lot about how we start off strong, and I think starting off strong is really important because we're going to reflect on those times when we continued in the season.

So starting off strong. We see our personalities, we see how we act in tough situations, and I think this summer Coach put us in situations where we had to be in those. We were in tough situations. That shows our true character, so I think resilient.

NYLA BROOKS: I would say togetherness. I feel like, like I said off the court as well, our team bonding, just being together in the locker room, just spending time with each other on the court and off the court. You can see it. Like we want the same thing. We want to get better every single day.

We come in with one goal, and that's to get 1% better every single day. We do that, and yeah, together is going to be our word for sure to describe our team.

COURTNEY BANGHART: I would say the climb. You know, I get excited about what's in the locker room. I get excited about how together and resilient they are, but I also know the climb that's ahead, right?



I feel grateful that I've got the guys I want to be on the climb with, but I know it's going to be a climb and it's not always going to be linear. But we've proven it. Last year I think we lost three of the our five ACC games, and we had to win the rest of them to host. That's a climb, right?

We're in for the climb. I don't know what that's going to be, but we're going to climb it.

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