

# 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 Coach Courtney Banghart Alyssa Ustby

### Deja Kelly

Media Conference

South Carolina - 88, North Carolina - 41

COURTNEY BANGHART: Huge congratulations to South Carolina and their fan base. They really wrapped their arms around this program. Obviously a home-court advantage is helpful. They've earned it and it played to their advantage.

They played really well on both ends of the ball. I think they were 8-for-10 from 3 in the first half. And their primary all-stars are at the post position. So played really well.

Defensively, they had a great game plan. We don't have a lot of ball-handling guards. The last time we played them, we had three different ball-handling guards in, so Deja could play the off the ball some. Now with our roster depletion that wasn't what we could do.

They did a good job squeezing and shrinking the court from her, and clearly our guys had to go a lot of minutes. You add fatigue to it. I think they had 50 bench points or something. We had zero.

So these guys are gassed on top of it. And that showed itself in a lot of different ways with turnovers and a lot of misses. We didn't shoot the ball very well.

Again, this is a really good team. They've proven it all year. Playing in Cardoso's last home game wasn't our choice, but hats off to them. They'll be a tough out for whoever they get throughout the rest of their journey.

**Q. What did you see from the South Carolina defense**



**that was so disruptive for you guys today?**

DEJA KELLY: They had a lot of intensity, a lot of energy. They were making us catch it really high. They started off picking up full court. So they just brought the pressure on. And I felt like I had two people on me at all times.

And I think just their defensive intensity was really high from the jump. And they got a lot of steals, a lot of run-outs which ultimately led to, I think, their 11-0 run to start.

ALYSSA USTBY: Similarly, they're really competitive, active the full 40 minutes. And they made everything for us pretty tough. Even on the offensive and defensive glass they were always crashing. They were just creating a lot more opportunities for themselves.

**Q. Today wasn't what you wanted, but how do you reflect on this season as a whole? Another 20-win season for you guys. And did you see progress in what you are trying to attempt?**

ALYSSA USTBY: Yeah, I definitely saw progress throughout the season. I felt like this group was very resilient. We faced a lot of adversity, whether that was in live play inside the lines or that was off the court with some of our teammates getting injured.

The season required a lot of people to step up and fill different shoes that maybe they not have wanted to fill, but it's what this team required for them. So it demanded the best out of each and every one of us.

DEJA KELLY: I think for me, my view is probably the opposite. This is one of our toughest years. It required a lot of pick-me-up from us vets. And obviously the injuries hit us hard. But it happens to every team.

But I think there were some moments, some strides throughout the season where you saw a lot of resiliency but there were moments where there wasn't. I think it was a lot of up and down. Just a lot of -- probably took a toll on everyone mentally a lot. But this is probably one of our toughest years, for sure.



**Q. A lot has been talked about your class and how you guys have sort of helped restore sort of the Carolina brand. As you reflect on that, after this game, how would you characterize what your class has accomplished for this program?**

DEJA KELLY: I don't think there's a good amount of words that can describe what we've done for this program and how we've built it up to where it is now. I can just say I'm really grateful to have been a part of it in these past four years and whatever the future holds.

But I think just for us, and to Alyssa, Z and Anya for us to go through all those ups and downs and all the adversity together and to still build the North Carolina brand and North Carolina program back up, I think it took a lot of toughness. It took a lot of heart.

And for us to stay the course like we did and continue to give our all to this program to make sure that, now that it has our names on it, that we wanted to make sure to hold it to a high standard. I think we did just that.

ALYSSA USTBY: I felt like our group, our senior group laid a great foundation for this program. And we still have a long ways to go. And everybody in that locker room feels it and knows it, that we have higher expectations for ourselves.

But we make sure that we recognize the journey that we've been on and we're grateful for all the tough teams that we faced, all the adversity and ups and downs because ultimately it takes a lot of individuals who are willing to put aside their own personal goals or their egos in order to sacrifice for the team and what the team needs.

Today, I felt like South Carolina was just the better team. But this group has a lot of potential and so does this program.

**Q. Alyssa, what pieces or differences did you see from South Carolina's bench in this match-up compared to your earlier match-up in November?**

ALYSSA USTBY: I felt like their girls this time around coming off the bench were ready to go, and they were ready to compete. So they came out firing. They were not shy to take opportunities that they had, whether it was drives, getting rebounds, pushing the ball up the floor.

So a lot of credit to their team as a whole, but especially those bench players who came in and made a positive impact.

**Q. How did you kind of see physicality impacting**

**today's game? And how did that kind of limit you?**

ALYSSA USTBY: I wouldn't necessarily say that the physicality limited me because I felt like I had plenty of great shots, and they just didn't go in. Obviously that falls on me because I need to make sure I can knock those shots down.

But I felt I had plenty of great looks. My teammates are great because they do so many things, and I felt they did my job easier because the ball moved as best as it could. Obviously it didn't move well the entire game, but I felt like there were moments when I had great, wide-open looks. And those didn't knock down, and sometimes that's how it goes.

But my competitive energy, I'm going to get back to it and make sure this result doesn't happen again in whatever shape, form or fashion.

**Q. As the veteran leaders of the group, what have you told all the players as far as about the [inaudible] and how do you all just make it to the tourney and what was so special about being the veteran leaders? As veteran leaders of the group, what have you told your group as far as your experience, getting it to them and how [inaudible]?**

ALYSSA USTBY: I think as veteran leaders on the team, we have to lead. That's one thing that this team requires. And so I felt like we did the best job we could as prepping our girls who haven't played in the NCAA Tournament or maybe in front of this many fans or in this type of environment.

So with that experience, Deja and I and other seniors are grateful to have those past opportunities because I felt like we were as prepped for this game as possible.

DEJA KELLY: I think us having experience obviously in the tournament, this is our fourth appearance. So being able to kind of carry that over to the younger ones and even the newbies, just the best way that we could because this was some people's first time being in this position, having this opportunity.

Obviously our goal wasn't just to make the tournament; it was to try to go as far as we can. So us trying to continue to push everybody and push ourselves to the best of our ability, to continue to make a run, obviously we came up short. But I think the whole goal throughout the season was to continue to try to lead because that was our job.

**Q. Obviously every opponent tries to be physical on**

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**Deja. It seemed like there was more physicality against her today and more contact allowed. Can you talk about their approach to Deja today?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: As I said, we've got four point guards on this roster, which Deja is one of them. And three of them are out. She's the only one. You'll have to ask Dawn, but what it appeared to me the game plan was to take the ball out of her hands.

They had enough depth to see how the game is being played, and they can take one here and there and sub. Those weren't called. So then they get to play through that more and more. At the point of ball screens, at the point of non-ball screens, you can play more aggressively if you have someone who can go in for you.

I think they tried to make a secondary ball handler out of our team, and they did that. So we had to put the ball in other people's hands who that's just not their skill set yet. That's not how they see the game. So that really shrunk the court for us.

**Q. Obviously the first game in Chapel Hill was several months ago now. But in that game they only had 65, kind of took them a while to get into rhythm. Today they were kind of able to make several runs. What do you think, from your perspective, what do you think kind of changed from a defensive standpoint that allowed them to kind of go on those runs and get in rhythm the way they were able to?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: First off, they're at home. I think it's really great. The growth of our game makes these home games matter. I've been in the game a long time. And only in the last few years does home-court advantage feel as much as it does now. That's the first thing. We knew them playing at home was a totally different thing.

And then also to play these guys, they're so physical and so big and they've got so much at every spot, takes an enormous amount of energy. So we played 11 guys the last time we played them.

We played basically six this time. So over time, you have to decide, all right, am I going to take away their interior game with activity, or am I going to play 1-v-1 there? And they made big shots. They didn't make as much in the first game. We weren't able to extend the court as much.

We kind of had to pick our battles a little bit. So that skeleton of our crew, you can't play kind of at the same pace defensively that we wanted to play at.

**Q. Obviously not the way you wanted it to end, but do**

**you feel like forward steps were made, progress was made in building your program for the long term?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Every year is so unique. I think we've really built a pride in the program again, and the fan base is really electric. We've had a lot of great wins in that way.

I think what's hard, though, is that you also want to be able to develop your younger guys. And, again, we just didn't have them. They're not playing right now.

So I think that, looking forward to the offseason, getting to work with these guys a little more because they're close to being healthy and a couple of them are practicing, they're just not playing in games.

But to make a tournament we know is really difficult. I think beating a good Michigan State team with this (indiscernible) we've been playing with for six weeks, I think I grew a lot as a coach because we didn't have as much.

I like to play read and react and teach our guys how to play with one another. With some limited skill sets in certain spots, we had to be more of a controlled action. So I really had to try to get them certain spots on the floor kind of throughout the game. So that's not really how I have built our success. So that was kind of a good, good thing for me to have to do in stretch there.

I think in the grand scheme of things it's hard after a loss to say, are you where you need to be. But if you told me -- if you had showed me the group I was going to be in with for the whole six weeks, they've done a lot of really, really good things -- a round of 32 with this group and how committed they are to how they leaned in.

I told them in the locker room, it's so easy when things go hard to put one foot in one foot out. It shows I don't really care, it's okay if it doesn't work out. But these guys, it meant a lot to them. And they said, they felt it.

And as things got messy in the roster they stayed caring and stayed leaned in. And good things come from people who are built like that. I think in the grand scheme of things, yes, I'll probably need a little more time to answer that more thoughtfully.

**Q. I don't know who is coming back or who is staying, but your first recruiting class, some of them just played their last game in the uniform, I don't know.**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah.



**Q. But if they did, didn't, whatever, what was their impact on this program and on you?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Wow, I told them that in the locker room that I wasn't ready to address that in that moment, right, because how do you categorize people that believed in you before you'd done it?

And that's what us coaches do all the time. We believe in kids before they've done it. But when you take over a new program, you're asking them to do that the other way around.

And that's not the common walk. And then with someone of Deja's stature who knew, she knew this would not be just like this; she knew it would come with something. And then you look at the other three that have stuck by it and with it and improved.

Alyssa's relentlessness is -- to have gotten her to be a great athlete and becoming a really good basketball player, there's real growth in that.

I'm not sure I'm able yet. And I told them that because the emotion of preparing your team to win takes kind of all you got and then how to navigate takes another -- only what you have left. And to honor them in the way they deserve to be honored takes a fresh mind.

But I think right off the cuff it's that they believed in me before I had done it. And we went to four straight NCAA Tournaments. And they've made it a hard ticket to get. And they've shown that this is a special place to play basketball. They've kind of brought that back.

I don't know if we'll ever be ready to kind of talk about their impact, but sometimes you don't have to if the program continues to move forward, you know that you were there when. And that's what I think they'll be most remembered for.

**Q. I guess with the limited bench, what did the last 24 hours look like for you in terms of preparing for the depth that South Carolina had in combatting UNC's fatigue?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: A lot of body work through mobility and massage and recovery. A lot of walk-through. A lot of film, which is kind of what this group has had to do. They've had to learn by watching film and less by doing it. It's hard because not everybody learns that way. We all learn differently.

But from a sports-performance perspective we've got to save all we've got for game day mentally and physically.

We didn't overwhelm them either physically or mentally because we knew we would need it on game day.

We knew our margin would be small, especially at South Carolina. And, so, yeah, I would say it was mostly body recovery and lighter loads so we could have as much in the tank coming into today.

**Q. Dawn was in here earlier talking about the balance when you're up by a lot, especially the second half, wanting to stay engaged, keeping your foot on the pedal, not necessarily run up the score. What's your perspective coaching on the lopsided result, struck that balance well. Do you feel like what she said there is what played out in the second half?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: I'm not smart enough or getting paid enough to worry about what her team's doing. I've got to work on my team. So what I was doing was I hope they play to the personalities as leaders, that they just never stop. I don't know what her intention was. She's here to win a national championship. So are we.

This is high-level Division I basketball. Feelings don't matter. They just don't. What happens inside the lines is what has to happen.

So I don't know. I would trust whatever Dawn said she was trying to do, I would trust she was trying to do that.

**Q. What were your thoughts on the environment today, and for women's basketball in general? I've seen several of the NBA legends say they know more names of the female players and teams than they do for the men now.**

COURTNEY BANGHART: For real. We always do kind of a March Madness, don't worry, no money involved, on the tournament. And we didn't even fill out a men's bracket. We're like, all right, whatevs, Carolina to the end. But outside of that, I've watched so much less men's basketball this year than I have in my whole life.

I think that will only continue because now, if I'm not scouting, I'm watching the game I want to watch, which is typically a woman's game given the level. And also the fan bases. This is a hard ticket to get. Our game was sold out against them. And obviously the home game matters now.

I feel prideful. It certainly wasn't my work that has done it, but certainly prideful to be a part of this game at the right time. I feel like it validates how much you put into this, that your players get to be a part of a movement at the right time; and so their job now, this generation of players, is to not only contain and continue, but it's to enhance. And

these fan bases and these environments and these resources are doing that at both institutions.

**Q. Last offseason some players transfer out and some transfer in. Do you anticipate that kind of transition, and what are the roster management challenges with at least two freshmen coming in and then the four seniors have a fifth year of eligibility out there?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Roster management is the new thing. I said this at my pre-press conference, the game has changed; if you don't like it, you should get out, because it's the only way to do it.

These kids have an annual decision to make. Is that a bad thing, maybe not. That's kind of -- I have an annual decision to make. We don't know (indiscernible) held hostage to where they're located anymore. So I think in terms of roster management, you really don't -- I've not asked our seniors. It's totally irrelevant until the season is over. Every season has its own unique group.

So the roster management is absolutely a part of it, and the portal works both ways, as I've been a beneficiary of. So there's the kind of conversations that will happen over the next couple of weeks, and again I'm not smart enough to focus on anything besides beating South Carolina, and that will shift focus now to the next step for our program.

**Q. Obviously when Deja was in here, she was saying that this year more than probably other years have been a longer, tougher year. Obviously those are her words and everything like that. But did you sense it from her the course of the year that maybe this was a lot on her, maybe more than the other years you had been coaching her?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: She had more running mates. Again, I don't know even how many we have in uniform. Nine. We have zero scholarship guys off the bench. Zero. You're trying to play an NCAA Tournament game against an undefeated team on the road. It's not a great equation for success.

So where she might want three minutes every quarter to rest, where she used to have that, she doesn't have that right now.

So you're doing things -- there's a little more focus on you and you're fatigued. And so I think what made it harder, some lessons are good and some resiliency is good, but so too is an opportunity to have your 12 against their 12 or your 14 against their 14. I don't know how many they played tonight. 12 or something. But we had five guys play over 27 minutes. They had zero. It's a lot of minutes

to play in an environment like this.

I think what made it hard was you had Cayla run the 1 the last time we played. Then Reniya would sub in for her and Paulina also played some at the 1. Those kids are not here. There's not a lot of movement or wiggle room or rest, recovery, or process and get to step away and watch.

So I think that, again, everyone deals with injury. I'm not sure you deal with five at the same position. That was a really unique challenge for this group this year. I think that's what made it hard for her because she was the only one left, and she's best when she can be a combo. She can play the 2, the 1, and we can hide her in various spots. And that wasn't a possibility this year as the year went on.

**Q. Looking at the beginning of this game, what did you kind of see happening on the floor that made it so difficult for you guys to find some rhythm?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: I mean, they took great advantage of their crowd. Your basket looks better. It's the gym you practice in a lot of times or you've played a lot in. So you're a little bit less gun shy. That's true across all these top 30 teams. And you look at the home scores, how many they average at home versus how many on the road.

It's a big difference. This is where they're comfortable. And 8-for-10 from 3 at any level will win you that half. They shot lights out. They didn't need to do a lot in the post. Maria did a good job handling Cardoso.

But you'd get into their ball screen, when you negate the ball screen, they are able to hit the open guy, they would make that shot. We were 3-for-18. It was a perfect storm. They shot way above their average and we shot below our average. So, mathematically, it's never going to go so well for you.

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