

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 2 Semifinal - North Carolina vs Duke

Thursday, March 27, 2025

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Legacy Arena

North Carolina Tar Heels

Alyssa Ustby

Reniya Kelly

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference



there was a chance for you to maybe get sent here in the Sweet 16?

RENIYA KELLY: Man, I was praying about it. I wish I could go to Birmingham because I do not want to go to Washington. It's just great. I just love this place so much because I have so much experience, and the atmosphere is always good here. So I'm really just happy to be back in this building really.

Q. Reniya, Duke, like West Virginia, is going to throw some pressure at you. How do you feel that this team is better at handling pressure from earlier in the season to this point?

RENIYA KELLY: I feel like all of the guards, all of the people on the court can handle the ball. So, I think from the last game I think we didn't really handle the pressure really well. We just let them kind of, you know, get us shaken up, but I think this game we are more comfortable with handling the ball and pushing it up the floor.

Q. For both of you. What does it mean to have this be the next chapter in the Duke-Carolina rivalry since, obviously, it's one of the biggest in sports to meet on this stage now to get to the Elite Eight? Playing the rival in Duke on the biggest stage now of the Sweet 16, one of the biggest rivalries in college basketball and college sports. What does it mean to be playing your rival to get to the next round?

RENIYA KELLY: Yeah. Obviously, everyone wants to win. The main focus is to win. Obviously, this is a big rival, and I think the fans are going to love it. The TV is going to love it. Everyone is going to love it. I just think we're ready to win a game.

ALYSSA USTBY: I think it's going to be cool to showcase on even a bigger stage what the Carolina-Duke rivalry is. Obviously, it's always a gritty game. So it's something that's going to be pretty cool to show the rest of the country.

Q. Alyssa, what's the challenge of preparing for a team for a third time? I know you and Reniya didn't

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. I have a question for both of you. I'll start with Reniya. What does it mean to you to be playing so close to home this weekend?

RENIYA KELLY: Yes, it means everything. I'm just going to explain this from the start. I played here my 8th grade, 9th grade, 10th grade, 11th grade, 12th grade and only lost one time, and it was my 9th grade year. So, this is like a full cycle for me. I'm really excited to be here, especially because my family and friends can come out and see me.

It's really a blessing to be back home and be close. It's, like, 20 minutes away from my house, so this is really close to me.

Q. Then, Alyssa, this is your final year as a grad student. How does it feel to be part of something -- part of history playing Duke for the first time ever, your biggest rival, in March Madness?

ALYSSA USTBY: It's something super special. There's not a lot of firsts that can be done at Carolina because it's such a rich program with a lot of great history. So, we're just excited for the matchup and to be in the Sweet 16 again.

Q. Reniya, you're about 4-1 in this building?

RENIYA KELLY: Yeah.

Q. What was it like playing here as a high schooler when the brackets came out? When did you know that



play that second game. How does that change maybe the preparation as whether you watch that film as tight or not?

ALYSSA USTBY: Yeah, that's a great question. When you are this familiar with a team, your preparation looks a little bit different because, obviously, we know our personnel really well, we know who we're playing against, we know their A and B options of scoring. So we kind of have to take another couple of steps further in our scheme and how we're going to defend them and how we're going to attack them offensively. So there's definitely a different package of preparation compared to playing, like, West Virginia, which is the first time. We spent a lot more of our focus on who they are as individual players and kind of their overall theme. It's a lot more detailed and takes a little bit more focus.

Q. Alyssa, those few games you missed towards the end of the season, having to sit out and watch the team from afar, is there any kind of perspective that you gained about this team having to do that and then reasserting yourself into the line-up?

ALYSSA USTBY: Yeah, I would say the only perspective I gained, which is something I already knew, is that we have a really deep bench, and we have a lot of girls that can step up on any given night. I think that's really crucial for success in the March Madness tournament as long and grueling as it is because if someone is not having a great night, we know that somebody else will be able to pick up the slack.

So we have a really deep team, and that's something that's really special. So just reinserting myself into the line-up, I just continued to bring what I've brought all season and contribute to my team in whatever ways that's needed.

Q. What did you learn playing Duke the first time about trying to limit turnovers, and what did you learn about watching in the second game? Did playing a game like you did on Monday against West Virginia, is that going to be helpful for you tomorrow?

RENIYA KELLY: So the first part, you asked me what did I learn from the first game? I think we can attack them more. I think we were so focused on their hedge that it got us out of rhythm on the basket to score. I think we do a better job of just -- that's the flow for them, just the hedge to get us out of rhythm. I think we're going to attack that more this game.

When I was watching, I hate just sitting out. It was just really hard for me to watch because I wanted to go to war for my teammates, but I knew we had a deep bench, like

Alyssa just said. I think everyone stepped up. We didn't have enough firepower in the third quarter, and I think it really took us back.

Your third point, what did you say about --

Q. Did going through a game like you did Monday against a team that pressures a lot, would that be helpful for you tomorrow?

RENIYA KELLY: Oh, yes, for sure. West Virginia really set us up for success just because we need to get open and get the ball so we can run our offense and get down the court. Duke pressure isn't the same as West Virginia, but it is similar. So I think we will be very prepared for Duke pressure.

Q. For either of you, Kayla McPherson was a key player and leader for you guys early in the season, and then, obviously, she went down with the injury. What, from your perspective, has been her transition to being more of a coach on the sideline for you guys, and maybe a moment that impacted you guys from her leadership perspective after her injury?

ALYSSA USTBY: Kayla is a really special piece to our team. She's in a unique position because she knows exactly what it's like to be a player because she's still a player on our roster, and she is really good at digesting what coaches say and what they're looking for and kind of being the bridge between the two.

She's really helpful to have on the bench because at any timeout or stop and play, she's talking to some of us on the court, telling us what she sees. Similar to Reniya, she has that point guard vision, and so she can read the game really, really well and help us make in-game adjustments before it needing to get to the coaches and us to figure out as a big group.

She's just been super instrumental in our success, and we're really grateful that she's on our side.

Q. Alyssa, after Monday's game, how long did it take to come down from that high? It did have to be one of the best experiences of your career.

ALYSSA USTBY: Yeah, it was very special obviously being my last time playing in Carmichael. I couldn't have scripted a better night.

It didn't take me too long. I mean, I knew that that's obviously a big game that we want to celebrate but also understand that there's more work to be done ahead. So, I just got to talk to my family after the game and then went

home, did my usual routine, and went and got some sleep because we had school the next day.

Yeah, we're just looking forward to more.

Q. Reniya, what is your favorite memory when you played here in those games? Do you remember shots specifically or anything like that?

RENIYA KELLY: I think it was my senior year. It was like 50 seconds left on the clock, and I subbed out. Everyone was just standing up and clapping for me. I was hugging all of my coaches and teammates. I was crying. I usually don't cry, but it was my most memorable moment for me for sure.

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