

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 1 Semifinal - North Carolina vs UConn

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Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

North Carolina Tar Heels Coach Courtney Banghart Indya Nivar Nyla Harris

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

UConn 63, North Carolina 42

THE MODERATOR: Joining us today we have head coach Courtney Banghart and Nyla Harris and Indya Nivar. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach Banghart.

COURTNEY BANGHART: Hats off to a really good UConn team. I felt like we made them go to plan B and plan C and plan D and they're just good. You know, they obviously were able to convert more than we were.

It was a really physical game. Obviously that led to way too many turnovers for us, not getting outside hips the way we usually do, and we usually shoot the ball a lot better from three. To beat a team like this you have to be really good. You have to make your open shots. You have to take care of the basketball, and we didn't do that.

I mean, obviously we could talk for days about the defense and how we really held them. You win two of the four quarters, but that third quarter turning it over that led to transition, you know, that really hurt us. So hats off to UConn. Really good team. We knew that, and we have to play really well to beat a good team, and we didn't, unfortunately.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. For Indya, what are kind of your emotions right now? What does this kind of mean for you and how do you kind of -- how were you able to lead the team



throughout the game?

INDYA NIVAR: A lot of emotions. I haven't really been able to process them all, but just really proud of my teammates, my sisters. I feel like we've grown a lot throughout this year, and we've grown together on and off the court, which you know, that's something you can look back and be proud of.

You know, try to lead through the adversities of the game. They're a really good team. They made it pretty difficult for us. I feel like we made it difficult for them, but, you know, some things weren't going our way. But we always want to keep playing hard, and I felt like I tried to lead my team to do that throughout the whole game, but just proud of them.

Q. For both of the players, in the first half the defense was really good and really held UConn in check. What was it you were able to do the first half?

NYLA HARRIS: Yeah, I think that we bought into the game plan, and we just wanted it. We just bought into sitting down, guarding, and making things tough for them. I think it kind of got them rattled definitely in the first half. We kind of made them go our pace that we wanted to go on defense, and I think that's why we had so much success in the first half.

INDYA NIVAR: Yeah, they were able to go against our set defense in the first half more than they were in the second half. The first level to you are on defense is taking care of the ball, and I feel like that was the biggest difference between each half.

They were able to get in transition, which is really hard to guard with all the offensive power they have. Yeah, in the first half we were able to, yeah, get into our half court. We didn't really take advantage of that in the second half. I feel like that's how they got a lot of points in transition.

Q. For both athletes, back-to-back Sweet 16 trips. What are you proudest of that you have been able to build with this program the last several years?

INDYA NIVAR: I'll just say I'm proud of how connected we



were as a team, how resilient we were. We went against every No. 1 seed this season, and I feel like we learned from each game a lot. We had to grow. We had to take it one day at a time, and that can be hard when, you know, you want to achieve a lot in the postseason.

Just really proud of how the group stayed together, stayed connected. We had a lot of new pieces this year, so even though I was on the team last year it looked a lot different this year in my role, in how we played. So, yeah, I feel like I'm just very proud, and I hope that they can build off this next year.

NYLA HARRIS: Yeah, I think Indya said it perfect. Coming into this program and being a huge part of it is amazing. I know that we went through a lot of adversity in the beginning half of the season, but it really challenged us, and it made us better. I think that we made it here for a reason, and it shows our resilience as a team.

I'm really proud of this team, and I'm so excited to see what Coach Banghart does with her next team. I know it will be great.

Q. Nyla, what were you seeing from Indya today and just overall how have y'all sort of been able to lead together, but also how have you seen her kind of lead throughout the season?

NYLA HARRIS: Yeah, Indya Nivar is an elite guard. I know how hard it is to play against her, and so being able to be beside her and see her growth is just amazing. It's so motivational.

Like I was telling her in the locker room, it really pushes me as player to step up, to be better in times where I feel like I can kind of relax a little bit. Her energy is contagious and how she carries herself is very contagious. I'm so proud of her. She's done amazing this season, and whoever gets her is very much lucky. I know she will do big things.

Yeah, I mean, she just did amazing tonight. She led in the way of her defensive presence, and it really showed why she had much success on both ends. I think having a player like that on your team, you need that, because it ignites everything else for the rest of the team, and it's contagious. It makes everybody else want to do the same thing.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, ladies. Questions for Coach.

Q. Courtney, obviously we know your relationship with Sarah. Talk about the impact she had on tonight's game. In the second quarter she had four made

baskets in two minutes.

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, you know, she's just such a hard guard. I mean, I love the kid. I love the kid, who she is, her core. I love her family, but I really love her as a basketball player. She's so fun to watch. And she's a problem, right? She was off the ball, hurt us in off-ball action and non-ball action.

You know, she's so unselfish. If she wants to score 40 next game, she can. She gets to make that choice, right? So, you know, we said -- I've said it multiple times, but coming in second for Sarah Strong is a tough one to come in second for, right? When you recruit someone with all you got, you root for them wherever you go.

I'm leading the Sarah Strong fan club, and I hope she continues to find the success that she's earning.

Q. How proud are you of Indya's performance tonight? I think it was a career high in points.

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah. I appreciate the opportunity to speak about her, because she's kind of all that's right, right? I told our guys, it's a good life lesson that when you give something all you got and you have enough courage to tell the world how important it is to you, things usually work out for you, right?

Indya came to us, felt like this was the right place for her to grow and develop, and her journey has been authentically hers.

I remember last year she was surrounded by our three seniors and Reniya Kelly who has been out, and the team looked really different. I looked at her and said, I'm going to surround you with good players, but they're going to be young. I'm going to trust our recruiting and development. Now I'm going to ask you to lead. I have asked you to do everything else, but I haven't asked you to lead. Now I need you to lead. She looked at me like oh, no, because that's not what she really wants to do. She's leaving North Carolina a leader, a winner, and a really good basketball player.

I think she's going to play. Obviously there's a lot of teams in the W that she would make better because of how she competes.

You know, it doesn't always work out like this where you do things the right way and it pays off, and she's just such an example of that. Really proud of her and have loved coaching her. She has always been easy to coach because she was in her own way. She really had some -- she let her doubt kind of carry her, and then we were able

to kind of squash the doubt. Now watch her shine. It's been fun.

Q. In the first half what worked so well defensively? Geno said that the half court -- your half-court defense was giving them problems, so they tried to score more quickly in the second half. What worked so well?

COURTNEY BANGHART: In the first half they played against our set defense. Our defense has been so good all year. I told them before the game and I tell them all the time that the story had been -- the narrative had been written about us before we wrote our story, right? The narrative was that I lost three elite defenders, and we're not going to be as good defensively. I've just challenged them all year to just write your own story.

So what happened in the third quarter is we turned it. We missed shots. We shot, what was it, god -- I'm not going to want to look back at it -- 2 for 17. Then I think we probably had ten turnovers in the third quarter. So they were not playing against a set defense. I've said it all year. There's no defense for a turnover.

I think when we watch that game back and you look at how many times they scored against our set defense, it's not a lot. So that game came down to missed shots and ball control. That's to the credit to them. Obviously their ball control was because they were really feisty on the ball. Like you said, adjustments he made at half. We take better care of the basketball. We make some shots at a higher rate, at a more normal rate for us; I think that's the game pressure we were looking for.

Q. Courtney, you mentioned the turnovers and the missed shots. Some of the players talked about how they felt sped up, they felt the ball pressure, and there were some opportunities they just missed. How do you grade the difference between what UConn was able to force and maybe some mistakes that you guys just made?

COURTNEY BANGHART: The arc. I mean, I think the arc. You don't take contested threes. That's just not what we do. So the arc, right?

So shooting 4 for 22, I think there's one other game where we shot poorly from the arc. I think the turnovers are mostly a function of their ball pressure, but the three-point shots are not sped up, because they're unguarded, you know. And so you just have to shoot better in a game like this when you are playing the No. 1 team in the country, and we didn't.

Q. Talking a little bit more about Indya, what's kind of

your favorite story or memory from throughout her career? How do you think that reflects kind of the impact that she's had on this program?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Not my favorite, but I remember we played another No. 1 team her sophomore year. We played South Carolina and she played four minutes in the whole game. I pulled her in, and I said, listen, this is not how it's going to go, but this is where you are. You've got to get better, right? She just doubled down on herself. A lot of people would have walked away, right? She just trusted us.

She just said in there -- I don't know if she realizes how much -- when she was talking to the team, you know, she thanked the coaches, and she thanked what I've done for her. I'm thinking, that's how it's supposed to be, right, that you coach a kid that means as much to you as you mean to them.

So probably her growth, and I think her leadership this year. I'm not sure it could happen to a better kid.

Q. You know, on the outside you're losing at the same point that you lost last year another game. In what ways has this season or has it felt like a step forward for the program?

COURTNEY BANGHART: That's a great question. First off, I want to say how hard it is. I think there's, what, nine teams that have been to back-to-back Sweet 16s. It's just really hard to do. Especially when we didn't fill it up with six transfers. We did trust our recruiting and our development.

What should have been on paper as a rebuild, it wasn't. We build every day, and so the sophomores that are now on our team are now the juniors, they got better every day last year to be in this position. So it's really rewarding.

I do think the program -- the more times you get here, the better your matchups are going to be, right? You just got to keep getting here. Obviously there are some different matchups that would have probably been better for us in this round, but that's not how the cards were dealt.

So sustained excellence is really hard, and when you have sustained excellence, it means you got more cracks at it. I think this program is in a really healthy spot, and I'm proud of that. I know how finicky the business is and how quickly things can turn, but I feel like especially with what we have coming in and what we have coming back, yeah, I think we're in a better spot than where we were at this point last year.

