

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Oregon State vs North Carolina

Friday, March 21, 2025

Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA

Carmichael Arena

North Carolina Tar Heels Coach Courtney Banghart

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have Coach Banghart here. Questions, please.

Q. There's a lot of really good basketball in this area this weekend with the three women's team hosting and the men's first two rounds sited in Raleigh. What's it say about the area being basically the center of attention in the NCAA Tournament this weekend?

COURTNEY BANGHART: How lucky for the people that live in this area. I think I saw Kelly Graves saying for as long as he's known women's basketball, the Triangle has been the epicenter of basketball, and we feel a sense of pride for that and a sense of responsibility to it. You don't want to be the one left out.

So you have really good teams on the men's and women's side all around an hour radius. You want to make sure your team is there and holding its side up.

I remember when I got this job, I think there were us and Duke and some other guys that weren't sort of where we are right now, and I know we've kind of all been, as much as it's hard to say, secretly routing for each other to bring basketball here, and I think it's arrived.

Q. First time in your tenure here hosting a first round game. What does that mean to you and obviously it says something about the growth of the program.

COURTNEY BANGHART: It sure does. That's probably one of the things I'm not really good at is reflecting, and I've really worked hard at that because I recognize how much effort and energy and intentionality goes into a journey like this.

So I've really been intentional to reflect on how hard it is to do. There's a lot of heavy weights in women's basketball,



but you are one of the heavy weights when you are hosting in March. It's one of those things, it's not political. It's actually performance-based.

Seeing all this March Madness stuff, knowing that I can be at my son's game tomorrow morning before coming to my own and things like that, it's pretty remarkable. Really proud of -- as Alyssa so eloquently said, there's a lot of people that have put their effort into this. We've gotten a lot of administrative support and really good recruiting people that have trusted me. We've got great staff people that have poured into this program.

So I'm kind of the spokesperson for a lot of people that have given so much for us to be in this spot.

Q. I'm kind of curious what you have seen so far from Oregon State. They're obviously a completely different team from last year, but they did go through the Elite Eight last year with the same coach anyways. What has stood out to you about them on film?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Well, first off, Scott Rueck is one of the best coaches in the game. He's won at every single level. He's found ways to win in different ways.

You know you're going against someone who is going to be prepared, and he's going to bring his team and play to his strengths in a way that puts his team in a position to be successful.

They've got above-average length in all ways, even from a basketball standpoint. So they've got great length, like Kentucky did. They're going to mix and match their defenses so they're going to really play a sagging style both in man-to-man and in zone.

They use their pieces to their strengths, and so it's March. As I told our guys, there's just no bad teams anymore. They're all just different. We'll have to make sure that we're prepared to play against this different Oregon State team.

Q. Coach, last night was the first women's basketball game in Carmichael since February 2019 that you were



not in one of the coach's boxes for. First off, how weird did that feel? How much pride did you feel it was your former assistant that got the win?

COURTNEY BANGHART: How cool. I went to the game, and I was conflicted in a lot of ways because I wanted to go and just be a fan because I just like college basketball and as a woman's coach, you don't get to go see games live. I got to go see games live.

Yet, you're also preparing because you're paying enough attention and in case that's a team you might see down the road. Then you're also watching one of the coaches that coached with you. Megan was on my staff for six years, and watching her grow into her own identity as a coach and have her team play to her personality, I'm so filled with pride, right? I'm not supposed to be rooting for anybody.

Then my other former player is the head coach at Lehigh, who is playing Duke tomorrow -- or now today. So her parents came to the game. So I get to see all these parents and people that have watched when I was young. So, yeah, it was really special, and I was kind of conflicted in a lot of ways, but I paid enough attention.

Q. Kind of piggybacking off of that, I don't know how many coaches in the NCAA Tournament have three of their former assistants players coaching also in this tournament, and they're all also right here.

COURTNEY BANGHART: Isn't that crazy?

Q. We saw Addie yesterday at Duke and over at NC State and Megan here. What is it like for you?

COURTNEY BANGHART: It's awesome. You've been doing it long enough that I have coaches, assistant coaches, littered through the business across all levels. To watch them have so much success and then to be put in this area. I've gotten to see their families. You get to secretly see them at times and root for them and give them a pat on the back and a hug.

Not that you need to be validated, but my time with them is a part of their journey. That's partly why you get into coaching is so you can be a meaningful part of other people's journeys.

For Carrie and Addie and Megan, I was a meaningful part of their journey as they were for me. So I think it's as cool for me that they're here as it is for them. They all said, Look at you, you're hosting. I said, Look at us. It's kind of an us thing. It's been very cool.

Q. You dealt with some adversity late in the year with

those injuries. I just want to know what you learned about your team that maybe you hadn't before and kind of learning to persevere without them?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah. You never want injuries, especially at that point in the season. I give my kids a lot of credit with their resilience really. Why I say resilience is we knew we were in a position to host, strongly, firmly looking at the 2, 3 seed. Then those guys go down.

Then you have to find a different way to win because not only is it two impactful all-league players, but one is your relentless rebounder and one is your point guard. Therefore, you have less depth. So you are at the end of the season when you are most fatigued, and you have less people. You have 30 minutes a game times two that no longer is available.

So the resilience that it took for those guys that played, the resilience that it took for them to play a different way because when you play a different point guard, it's just a different style that you have to adjust to.

So I think the resilience and the two injured guys in what Reniya and Alyssa did to come back so quickly, I think their resilience. I liked how Maria worded it. There's a solution-oriented mentality of this group, and I think we just quickly found solutions as best we could as well as those that were injured finding solutions so that they could also be more able to help us.

In the moment it was really hard, and I just said to myself, we'll be better in March once we get through it, and I hope to prove that.

Q. Courtney, if you could put on your WBCA hat for a second, obviously having units this year is something new and a good step for women's basketball. Just talk about that for a second. The other part is, you are around the game for a bit now. When you first started coaching, it was very different than it is now as far as things that you have to deal with. It's not just Xs and Os and recruiting. It's now transfer portals, NIL, other things that I'm guessing when you first got into coaching was not one of your concerns. So just thoughts on where this game is headed as a coach, and what would you suggest to young coaches to say this is still worth getting into are or find something else to do with your profession?

COURTNEY BANGHART: 100%. I'll start with that part. College athletics has changed a ton. I came from non-scholarship Division I, and we went through COVID and the transfer portal and added NIL. A lot of things have change even during my time at North Carolina.



College athletics has always been about two things: The talent that plays it and those that support it. I just don't think that part will ever change.

As a coach and for people asking about young people joining the business, if you care about other people's journeys and you want to be a part of those that support it, it remains the best profession in the world. It's not easy, and there are -- I often say there are easier ways to make money for sure, but I'm not sure there are better ways to spend my time.

You're kind of in that sort of mix. Yeah, it has changed tremendously, and I just try to really -- you know me well. I just try to keep focused on what makes me successful: connection, solutions, resilience. Then that's kind of how I handle the business as a whole.

WBCA, I mean, that role has given me access to so many different conversations in so many different rooms. Every conversation and every room I've been in I just say units over and over. It's like it was my first and last word I ever spoke, right, because it is overdue. Is the number right on units? No, it's not, but it's a start.

It allows us to be validated and rewarded for postseason success, which on your own campus now puts pressure on your administration to value and invest in your women's game, right? It's basic economics.

You watch these tournaments, watch Carmichael tomorrow and go across the tournaments. Women's basketball is on fire and to not take economical advantage of that would be both on your campuses of those programs that have invested in women's basketball, but also nationally would be a mistake.

So I'm grateful that the rooms I've been in as the President of the WBCA has allowed me to just keep pushing. People who know me know that if I think it's right, I'm going to keep pushing. Along the side of many others, we were able to just say it enough to ensure that units have arrived. I think it will only improve as our game improves. I say as women we just have to provide value. If you provide value, keep doing that day-to-day. As we've done that, we're continuing to see the growth of our game.

Q. Obviously we just talked to your three veteran players that have had a lot of March experience. On the flip side, how do you go about preparing freshmen and sophomores who have not seen this environment of play like Ciera or Lanie and Blanca, and all of them?

COURTNEY BANGHART: It's a little bit like preparing me

to be a parent. You just kind of figure it out as you go.

I was in probably at, I don't know what time, but Lanie is in the gym working. There isn't a moment to reflect on that. There's a moment when that ball goes up that it's the same sport we've been playing.

I think there are certain things in life that I'm not sure you can really prepare for. I think there are more of those moments than there are not. I always say, you operate in two ways. You're either afraid of failure or afraid of regret.

I choose to live and hope to surround myself with those that are afraid of regret. So what we're not going to do is be afraid and potentially, therefore, be afraid of failure. We're going to be afraid that we're going to regret how we don't perform in these moments or what we don't bring in these moments.

I don't really know how I can prepare them for it. They might be a little starry-eyed. I'm not exactly sure, but I know that we'll make sure that she and her young classmates don't regret the opportunity that they've earned.

Q. (Indiscernible) units. If I have this right, because of the ACC's success initiative, women's basketball is a part of that.

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah.

Q. As teams in the ACC earn units, women's basketball -- you're going to get a bigger piece of that because you were winning those games. I guess what does that just say about this conference and how it cares about women's basketball and if you were a part of those conversations at all? It sounds like the ACC was kind of pre-preparing for units to come.

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, I think that those are decision, fortunately, that -- I've got other decisions I have to make. I don't have to make those or get to make those maybe.

I think that this conference has been awesome. I mean, the level of preparedness you get from every night, there's a level of investment across the board. Perhaps some more than others. You know, there's just -- I remember when I left the Ivy League, part of it was I think our margin of victory my last year was 27 points a game. I just needed a different challenge. I was ready for a different challenge.

Then I'm not kidding, I say it every year, where is the bad team? I'm missing some of those 27-point wins, right? There's just not any bad teams. The ACC has prepared these teams that are playing in March really well, and they



should be really proud. Even if those teams themselves aren't playing, be really proud because they have prepared all of us who are. I think we're all better for their part in our journey.

Yeah, it's fun to root for them. It's not fun to play them.

Q. Courtney, just heard Alyssa talk about how special it is to get to play in Carmichael again. What was kind of the process over the past couple of weeks with her, and how special is it for you as her coach to see her get at least one more game and potentially two more games in Carmichael and your relationship with her?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah. This is the house that she's rebuilt in a lot of ways. To not have her name announced on Senior Night was really hard, and then hearing her ovation at the NCAA Tournament, I won't forget it. She deserved it. I know there will be a lot of people that are so grateful for what she's given to this court over her five-year tenure.

She said it so eloquently. The fact that we get to host, we get to give back to the fans and the people that have supported us. This place is rocking, whether it's our students or our general fans, it is one of the premiere places to play in the country.

Unfortunately, I don't get to be a part of that. I'm coaching, so I don't get to sit and enjoy it in the same way, but there are a lot of people that have chosen to show up. The fact that we get to bring March Madness to them, I'm almost as happy for them as I am for my team because of how much they have been a part of our success, and they make this a home court advantage all year. We literally are bringing them a gift in bringing them March Madness.

Super thrilled, and for Alyssa, it's a main reason she came back, her wanting a chance to host. It's a main reason she came back so fast from being sidelined was that the opportunity to give it back on the court a few more times.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports