

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

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA

Carmichael Arena

North Carolina Tar Heels Coach Courtney Banghart

Lexi Donarski

Alyssa Ustby

Media Conference

North Carolina 70, Oregon State 49

THE MODERATOR: We'll start off with an opening statement from Coach Banghart.

COURTNEY BANGHART: We're certainly grateful to be in this position. Carolina has put on a really good crowd for us today. That's why you earn hosting.

I asked these guys after did they take that moment in about how many people have really gotten behind this team? That's the benefit of the work you put in. So that was really fun.

It was a little rusty coming off of two weeks without a game, but we really got to find our rhythm and show the progress we've made in the second half with better -- on both ends, quite honestly, being crisper, moving it better, shooting it with better pace and rhythm.

Then Alyssa, what do you say about a kid that just set the rebound record at a school and a program that is as rich in tradition as this one? It's hard to come to a place like this and do something that hasn't been done before, right, or be No. 1, and couldn't happen to a more deserving kid.

Really it means a lot to her, as it should, and I'm super proud that I get to be the one that coached her, the one who has now the rebound record at the University of North Carolina.

So great win. Great team that we had to beat. That's kind of the case in March. We're moving on, which is really exciting.



THE MODERATOR: We will start with questions for the student-athletes. We have Lexi Donarski and Alyssa Ustby.

Q. Curious what fueled your third quarter shooting surge?

LEXI DONARSKI: I think it was really the defensive intensity that we came out with. We pressured them and were able to turn them over. I feel like over half of our steals that we had in this game had to have come from that third quarter. Just pushing pace offensively through our defense. The majority of those looks were in transition.

Q. Alyssa, can you kind of go through your emotions at that moment when you broke the record? How were you feeling, and what did it take for you to get to this moment?

ALYSSA USTBY: Well, I think it's taken a lot of perseverance to get to this moment because that's not a goal that I set out to reach right when I got on campus. I just trusted that if I did the right things under Coach Banghart, then those things would come. So I never really had to worry about it.

I just had to keep playing true to myself, and rebounding is a skill I've developed over the course of my career here. So that kind of is just like the icing on the cake.

But in that moment it was just really cool to see a lot of people just cheering and kind of being in that moment with me. Ultimately, I was focused on making sure we came out with a win even though we were up quite a bit at that point. So my focus was really on Oregon State, but I was really trying to take in the moment and look around a little bit at the 5,000 fans that we had here today.

Q. Alyssa, can you talk about your versatility? About half of the first half you were playing the five spot and giving up four or five inches. That had to have been a challenge, but you got through it okay.

ALYSSA USTBY: It was actually really a exciting



challenge. When I saw I was getting pushed to the five, I was, like, Yes. I want to bump around with girls that are much taller than me.

I stuck to what I knew my strengths were, which is just rooting out my post player as long as I could and just keeping her from moving. So literally just arm-battling with her. She eventually -- both of them got pretty fatigued and didn't even want to try posting up anymore, and that plays to my strengths. So I was really excited to do it.

Q. You've now done two things at this program that nobody else has done. You've grabbed more rebounds than anyone else. You have the only triple-double in program history. I guess just like Coach Banghart said, considering how much history and how many good players have come through this program, does that kind of help put it in perspective to you, like your impact that you've had here in five years?

ALYSSA USTBY: I think I've still had a hard time kind of absorbing that and kind of taking that zoomed out perspective. Again, I know what I came here to do, which is to give my college career my all and try to make an impact, and I just want to be a part of a team that makes it really far in March and wins a championship.

So that's what we're set to do and our sights are set on that, but maybe further on the road I'll zoom out and appreciate that a little bit more.

Q. Lexi, you had a 17-point third quarter out of 30 points. Have you ever shot that well? I mean, you looked like you were in practice. Have you ever shot that well even just in high school or AAU or rec ball?

LEXI DONARSKI: I don't know. I'm sure that's a question we could ask Matt. I feel like, like I had said earlier, our defense just pushed us forward. We scored, what, 30 points in that quarter alone. It was all because we turned them over. We forced them to play faster than we wanted. We got them trapped in situations that they didn't want to be in.

I feel like we came out with a different mentality in that third quarter and that just really pushed us forward.

Q. Lexi, I was wondering if you could speak to what Alyssa means to the team? We talked a lot about her legacy, and Coach has talked a lot about her, but I'm wondering as a teammate what does she mean and what does it mean to see her get that -- get her moment that she didn't get on Senior Night and get the rebounding record?

LEXI DONARSKI: Yeah, I would say, I mean, for us to be hosting, Alyssa is the first person that comes to mind. Missed her Senior Night. We all wanted her to have another chance to play at Carmichael. She's just given so much to this team and this program. For her to be able to play in Carmichael again, it means a lot to all of us, as I'm sure it does to her.

To be able to share that moment with her after we all knew that she broke that record was really special. We all knew it happened, and thankfully someone had to tie their shoe so it stopped the game. It was fun to celebrate with her in that moment because she just brings so much to the team. Her competitiveness, her willingness to fight on both ends of the floor, obviously her rebounding. Yeah, we're really happy to have her.

Q. I'm wondering, you guys have had both -- both have had so much experience over the past few years. What do you think this game means for the freshmen and the younger players on the team?

ALYSSA USTBY: Yeah, I think a part of the obligation of the starting five is to start the game off really well, not only for fighting to get a win, but making sure that we can get our entire roster in the game to get them experience because they're going to be called on at we don't know when in tight games and situations, so the more experience that we can get everybody, the better.

I mean, Jordan Zubich came in and gave some really crucial minutes. Was moving the ball well, contributed on defense. Obviously got a big bucket. Just expanding and showing our depth is just really important that we were able to do that in this game.

LEXI DONARSKI: We have a lot of people that are willing to bring their piece, so similar to what Alyssa was saying. Those freshmen and those younger players being willing to step in, not being shy of the moment, and just doing what they need to do to help us.

Q. Alyssa, how important is your legacy? I believe you said that you knew how many rebounds you needed to get at the season, and you've been counting them down. So this is something that's been in your mind all season. How important is the legacy for you?

ALYSSA USTBY: I think the most important thing for me is to contribute to something larger than myself, so i.e., our team and this program, and to inspire people in the stands. Specifically like young girls that look up to me and the rest of our team.

I just want to make sure that -- it's not only important what I do, but it's how I do it. Just consistently coming in and getting rebounds, which is a part of my job as like a forward is making sure I get rebounds on both ends of the floor because that helps our team win. That's what's most important to me for sure.

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

COURTNEY BANGHART: Alyssa, my son wanted to see me before the game. I haven't seen him, so I gave him a hug. He said, Hey, mom, if we lose, can I hug Alyssa on the court? I said, We're not going to talk about that right now (laughing).

Q. Obviously we talked about the record and everything, but it's rebounding that she's really built her career on. What does that say about her character that it's just such a gritty position to rebound offensive rebounding, things that she's done, the little things that she's built her career on?

COURTNEY BANGHART: I think the big thing is toughness is a skill. I think so many people think that toughness is just like we can make everybody tough. It's a skill at an elite level. Her toughness has been a hallmark of our program, and it's why she's so adored. Rebounding is a toughness stat, especially at 6'2", guarding a 6'7" kid today.

On both ends she's had key rebounding. I can think of countless games where her rebounding impacted our winning. You know, it's just that her skill of toughness shouldn't be overlooked, and I know in our home base it's not, right? There are certain people that have certain other skills that are elite. Hers is toughness. To have a kid that has that as their super power on our team is why we're sitting up here hosting in March.

Q. Coach, I think a lot was made about Oregon State having a pretty big frontline.

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah.

Q. And you outscored them in the paint 40-16. Didn't seem to have a problem there. Was it just toughness, or was it a little bit more than that?

COURTNEY BANGHART: You know, like when we played Kentucky, people that have great size, we always say you want big guys to have to -- don't let tall kids stand and be tall. We want them to move.

So we want to do try to hold our press as long as possible

so they couldn't necessarily use halftime to critique it. Being able to come out and force turnovers, those, of course, count as paint scores in transition, but we were able to spread them out just enough to get some 1v1 for Maria in the paint.

Yeah, we didn't want them to just load to the ball and be tall. We were able to move them a bit, which gave us some paint advantages.

Q. In the second quarter when Maria went to the paint for two fouls, instead of going to Block or Ciera, you went to Alyssa for the five. What went into that decision, and how did that play out?

COURTNEY BANGHART: You know, they were really small outside of that one kid. So we wanted to make sure that we had a little bit more movement on the offensive end and not letting them kind of be tall, right? Even when they went to their double big line-up, it meant that Rees had to come out and guard on the perimeter.

So you have two choices. You either match them, or you opposite them. We just chose to opposite them because Alyssa doesn't -- that matchup didn't worry me. Letting Alyssa play the five? No problem.

Then we had the advantage in the one through four spot given that they had to then play with a lot of space, which lets us -- I thought we got good looks. We were just really rusty in the second quarter, but you know, we also -- yeah, if you had told me that she would be the five going into this game, I wouldn't have believed you, but that's what the game called for.

Q. Coach, this is the most wins you have had in a season in your era here in Tar Heel Country. What does that mean for you? How are you setting your legacy and solidifying that right now?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah. I don't even know how many it is. It's a lot. How many wins is it? It's a lot, which is good. Yeah, it's a lot.

You know, it takes a lot. It just takes a lot. Each win is what's -- the hard part about coaching is if you attach yourself to the wins and losses, you're going to miss the whole journey. So no one is in this seat unless they're uber competitive. That's part of our elite skill is that we're super competitive if you're sitting in these seats.

If I know my win and loss record to a T, then I'm missing the journey, right? So certainly when you are following Coach Hatchell, you're not talking about legacy. You don't come to North Carolina to build your own legacy if you are



coming to a place whose coach is in the stands and their banner is up.

I thought this was a place that I could get kids that fit the way that I want to play and that I could coach some of the very best players in the country from a skill set standpoint and athletic standpoint and without any sort of handcuffs.

So I've been able to do that. I've been able to get the kids that I wanted to coach. I've gotten them to be able to play the way we want to play, and that's gotten us a lot of wins this year, and it got us a lot of wins in years past as well.

I was brought here to do a job. I promised our athletic director I would give him my very best. We've been doing that kind of day in and day out. That's probably my legacy.

Q. At halftime you're only up by two. You knew that you were going to unleash the press, but you are didn't know that Lexi was going to make five three-pointers. Were you comfortable at halftime? What was the mood at halftime?

COURTNEY BANGHART: It's kind of been the way this first round has gone with teams with two weeks off. You saw the State score. You can go right on down the line. I don't know who ended up winning some of those games because they were all close and through the first half.

So we haven't played in two weeks. We obviously have been practicing, but there is an element of rhythm that gets a little bit disrupted from that when you are going game, game, game, and then all of a sudden you stop. So I was not happy, and I wasn't comfortable, but I also sort of got it.

So we didn't have to make a ton of changes. I felt like we needed to be more shot-willing quicker. I thought we had settled into the game in terms of how they were guarding things so that we could go to some different stuff now that we kind of saw how they guarded.

I also thought we were a little tentative, like we were settling a little bit in the first half being a little out of rhythm, and I wanted us to finish through chests. I wanted us to win the paint and play off two for self, for others. We were just more aggressive, and the ball went in the basket, which I've always said makes you a good coach.

It was a quicker release. She wasn't as sort of what does the team need and more as a finisher, which is what she's better at.

Q. Jordan played the most minutes since late November. Why was this the time for her to get so many minutes? She had a nice drive. She had some

decent play.

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, she can play. You know, no one watches more film than me and my coaching staff, right? We've had a lot of competitive practices since our last game. So there's just a constant state of evaluation.

When I talk about the journey, it's kind of what I mean. I know I've been watching all 14 of these kids every day. The fans and the media don't get to see them very much, so it looks like she came out of nowhere. We've been able to assess her play minute-to-minute through every practice all year, and her trajectory has continued to rise. She's continued to add some skill. She's continued to understand pace and tempo.

I thought she gave us meaningful minutes. She played 11 minutes. That's good for her. We counted on her and we needed her, and she was there for us. She delivered.

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