

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Western Illinois vs North Carolina

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA

Carmichael Arena

North Carolina Tar Heels Coach Courtney Banghart

Indya Nivar

Nyla Harris

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: This is the practice day press conference for the 2026 NCAA Division I first round. We are joined by the North Carolina Tar Heels.

We have with us student-athletes Indya Nivar and Nyla Harris. Questions.

Q. Indya, facing the No. 1 mid-major individual scorer this the entire country, what excites you about that matchup given your propensity for playing great defense?

INDYA NIVAR: I think the opportunity to just play in March Madness is excitement enough. We watch film. We prepare like usual. It's just always exciting to step on the floor.

I know she's a good player, but I feel very prepared in our scout and belief in the team that we'll make it a very hard night for her.

Q. Nyla, getting to play a home NCAA tournament game, what does that mean to you and like what does that mean to bring that to this community?

NYLA HARRIS: Yeah, this was obviously, like she said, my first time hosting, and it's kind of surreal. It's kind of like I'm still taking everything in, looking around, realizing this is our practice gym and it's a media space.

I love Carmichael. I love playing here. So getting the opportunity to play two more games here is huge. I was watching last year seeing when they hosted and how



packed Carmichael was. It was just electric.

Being able to do this in my senior year is just huge. And playing with Indya and being able to have the send-out here at home is amazing. I'm super excited and the Tar Heel community is amazing. Carolina community is amazing. This decision was right time as Coach says. Was just perfect.

So no, I'm really excited. I really am.

Q. Indya, one person in this room that saw you as an up-and-coming young kid. Can you talk about going to Stanford and coming back home and second straight year playing in the NCAA in your home arena?

INDYA NIVAR: Yeah, a long journey. Looking back at that, I was so young. Choosing Stanford the first time, things happen. I feel like it was the right choice at that time, but time shows that maybe somewhere else was a little bit better. I'm glad that I was able to have the opportunity to take -- to transfer back home, be around family, somewhere I trust, and have a lot of loyalty and honest relationship with the coaches.

Yeah, and it's exciting to have this much success in my hometown, 30 minutes from home. Yeah, I have my family come to every game and to host two years in a row is just unbelievable. I feel like after last year some people probably doubted us that we'll be back in this position, but my belief in my teammates, like we just try to make the community and culture here one that everybody can develop, improve, and grow in.

I just feel like I'm very proud of that. Leaving that here, I don't know, I'm happy, excited to see what my teammates do with it next year as well, uh-huh.

Q. Indya, your family has come to every game. Do you have anyone else come in from further away for this tournament?

INDYA NIVAR: You know I'm excited to come is my sister finally. She's been playing her first year at Campbell and hasn't been able to come to a lot of games this year



because she's been playing her own games.

Now that she's out of season she's able to come. So I'm excited for her to come to these two games.

Q. Anything special to being your senior year, being able to host, too?

INDYA NIVAR: Yeah, you know, you want to have a lot of success. I just put everything I can into this season to have it be very successful, and I'm just proud of what we have done. Just excited for what we can do in these next couple weeks.

Q. For both players, how has the layoff gone for you? It's been almost two weeks between games. What did you do to gear back up to get on a run like you had in February?

NYLA HARRIS: Yeah, I think rest is the most important thing. I think going into my senior year the biggest jump that I've made personally is taking more rest for my body. I think in this time right now it's very important for us to take that rest, especially just mentally.

That little break that Coach gave us for about two days, some -- I think Lanie went home a little bit, but just took time away from the court in general. I think going into the NCAA tournament is just go, go, go.

It's five games but feels like it's really 10 because it's like you're moving, going, playing. And so I think it was really important for us to just rest and recover our bodies, and when we get into practice, even though the load will get lower and lower that was important for us to kind of be more intentional with our clarity and focus.

INDYA NIVAR: Yeah, the recovery was very important. I want to emphasize when we were in the gym we kept getting better. As Coach says, she reminds us every practice, the best teams keep getting better. I feel like those times in the gym each and every day we got a little bit better chemistry, sharpened up the things we need to sharpen up, so we can be the most successful.

Q. For both players, obviously the women have had a lot of success here at Carmichael for a long time. For older fans they think of Carmichael and Michael Jordan's and Dean Smith's earlier teams. How much are you guys aware of your own history here and its previous history under Dean Smith?

NYLA HARRIS: Yeah, well, for my first time being here, it's a lot of history. I mean, 19 Sweet 16s, seven Elite 8s, three Final Fours, and one national championship. Yeah,

got a little help from the wall.

That's a lot of history in itself. Of course I think I was about probably three months ago years old when I realized that Michael Jordan had played in this arena. I think they said it on my visit, but I didn't listen until one of my teammates said it. I was like, what? I'm playing on the same court as Michael Jordan?

That alone just shows how much respect they have for the women's game here. This easily could have been the men's arena. They gave it to us, and I think that's super important. Yeah, I think the history just goes so far beyond just the sport.

So I think how the women carry themselves here and how much of a priority we're here at Carolina is huge.

INDYA NIVAR: Can you repeat the question?

Q. (Regarding the history at Carmichael and Michael Jordan/Dean Smith.)

INDYA NIVAR: Yeah, I feel like we're aware. There is a quote in Carmichael that says, playing at Carolina is an honor, but winning is a tradition. I feel like the women's sports here, the culture just breeds success.

Yeah, I feel that part of it mostly, the specifics, all the details. I just feel like being here at Carolina just the community around winning and women in sports, it's just very high and like I don't think it's like this any other place.

Q. Nyla, I saw in one of your recent Instagram posts the caption was Godfidence. What does that mean?

NYLA HARRIS: I love this question. No, yeah, so my faith is a huge part of my life and my journey, especially my basketball career I've had to lean on God a lot. Just in terms of staying patient, staying -- having perseverance, enduring, really leaning on God and not my own understanding.

I think that Godfidence means a lot to me because it's always confidence, confidence, confidence, your confidence. For me I think yes I have confidence, but my confidence really comes from God and my relationship with him.

He really helps me with being able to not feed into the outside noise and really just be confident in my relationship with him and why he has me here. Just the blessing in itself. I think that the Godfidence that I have here at Carolina is he blessed me to be here at this specific time.

Going into the portal in your junior year is a really huge risk because you only have one year left. I really leaned on God in that situation and he gave me that Godfidence to step out and be on another team. Obviously Carolina is so huge and have a big huge role. The only reason I have a huge role is really because of him. So that's why I used that caption Godfidence.

Q. Nyla, NIL with Crocs. How often do you wear Crocs? How comfortable are they? What has it been like to have that deal and have that ambassador role with them?

NYLA HARRIS: Yeah, honestly I would've never thought that I would be having an NIL deal with Crocs if you would've asked me about a year ago. I just think it's honestly a huge testament to who Carolina is. I think that plays a huge part, what really Carolina means when you wear it across your jersey and how much attention that attracts.

I think it's a great opportunity. I love Crocs. I wear them a lot actually and there is one specific pair they got me, the gray ones, and I wear them every single day.

They're so comfortable. If any of ya'll want to get some, shop in my link in my bio. No, it's just a huge opportunity. Super grateful. But, yeah, love Crocs.

Q. For both players, how were ya'll able to sort of regroup after that loss to Louisville? If anything, what did you do individually to reset and take at that time off?

INDYA NIVAR: Just really resetting the body. I feel like those two games back to back took a toll. They were physical games and we left it all out there. Getting the body back right and taking the time we needed and mentally resetting as a team, making sure that belief is still there, just feeling that through the whole team, that we have a very good team here and we can do really great things these upcoming weeks.

I think those are the main things.

NYLA HARRIS: Yeah, just to piggyback off that, I think it's really important that -- I know for me personally losing to your former team twice is really hard. I think that we're -- I'll still take this team in a rock fight every time.

I think for me it was just really honing in on things I could have done better in that game and stepping up and being better mentally I would say. I think like when you play your former team a lot of triggers come and traumas, and I think that was just really important for me to get out of that and

really just be present with the team that I was with.

Yeah, just to say what Indy said, getting back, getting better, getting in the gym, working on what we work on. I still think we're a great team and we can go really far in this thing. Yeah, we're hosting just like them, so...

Q. (No microphone.)

INDYA NIVAR: I have no idea what he's saying.

THE MODERATOR: You'll have to try that one again.

Q. How big is getting the...

INDYA NIVAR: No idea.

NYLA HARRIS: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Can you type it?

NYLA HARRIS: I think he said how big is it to get two home games before you head out?

THE MODERATOR: Let's answer that question.

NYLA HARRIS: I mean, I think it's huge. I think that it's really important for us as a team to be able to play home and then go out to the region at a neutral site where everybody else will be playing at, so there is not really an advantage. Everybody is playing on a neutral site.

It's huge for our team just to stick together and be able to play in Carmichael last two times, especially for us seniors.

INDYA NIVAR: Yeah, just to have our support system here, you know, to be in a place where everybody can come, I think we have the advantage. Yeah, we need them every time we play at home. I feel like to bring it back to them was just a very proud moment for us.

That was something we wanted to do at the beginning of the season, so...

COURTNEY BANGHART: First off, I want to thank everybody for putting this on. Really we're thrilled to be hosting. I know it's a lot for any university to be hosting, but it's really special. I give the committee a lot of credit. They did their work.

I mean, if you had evaluated us in November and stuck with that narrative, I'm not sure we would be sitting here. When you look at the body of work -- and as Indy said the most dangerous teams are the ones that keep getting better.

When you look at the body of work over the last two months, we played our way into this spot and we're thrilled that we were able to make it work.

So I know it's a lot for all ya'll. We are appreciative that you're doing it. I'm happy to answer in any questions.

Q. You said coming into the season that you really trusted your recruiting and development. Was there a moment during the offseason or during the season that really instilled that trust in you and you were like, yeah?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, that's a great question. I think teams are built in so many different ways right now. We know we lost a lot, especially with Reniya having a limited role this year. We lost over 70% of our offensive and defensive production from a year ago due to graduation and only brought in two transfers.

That decision was made in live time last season. You have to make them before spring workouts really. Watching how much our youth in terms of our freshman going to be sophomores and sophomores going to be juniors, watching how much they got better throughout the season, even though they maybe weren't playing as much.

I know Ciera Toomey, we knew what she was doing in the gym, and watching our freshman play all season long, we made the decision we were going to trust our recruiting. My title is head coach. It's not general manager. So until further notice my job is to develop the pieces I get.

We make really thoughtful decisions in the recruiting process and stick with them and develop incredibly well here. I think when you look at hosting a year ago and all that was lost and then hosting again with a roster that wasn't just picked from other people's teams, picked from within, it says a lot about that.

So I'm really proud of our staff. Proud of the players that have bought into their own development and given us that chance to host.

Q. Something you just said, how much influence do you have on recruiting and who you guys are bringing in? I imagine you have a big say in that.

COURTNEY BANGHART: Uh-huh.

Q. Secondly, how have you gotten better? Are there some specific things this team is light years ahead in March than it was in November, December?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, I can answer both of those. They're different answers. Recruiting is 100% decisions I have to make. That definitely is the most important thing I was hired to do, and that's make good people decisions both with the staff and our players.

And so my job is to work with the coaches to make sure I have the people I want to coach and find a way to get them here. The general manager's job is to figure out the business part of that.

We've made really good decisions in the recruiting process and it's paid off. We've developed them when they get here, so they're a better version of themselves annually.

And then in terms of how much our team has improved I could go on for literally the rest of the press conference. I've been harder on this team than any team. I'm in my 19th year as a head coach. I've been -- the hardest on any team was this team because we are replacing so much.

The sense urgency, the sense of timing, the sense of rhythm, I just -- there was an urgency to me knowing how we scheduled in the non-conference. So in June we film everything. Every film session was hard. This isn't good enough. This level of communication, this level of toughness and effort, this level of pace, this level of accountability is just not good enough. It was over and over and over again.

To their credit, leaning in on Indya and Nyla Harris, they just leaned in and pointed inward and they really allowed me to push them and coach them and not make it a personal, she doesn't like us, right?

And then once we got better I would say by about -- in that tough stretch where we lost three of our first five ACC games, and actually I made an adjustment at that time.

I had stayed really hard on them, so when things didn't go their way I think they actually started to kind of break a little bit. Oh, no, maybe we're not as good as we need to be.

So I sort of changed the narrative and talked about the holistic approach. There is a lot of statistical categories that contribute to winning. There is rebounding and field goals and threes and turnovers. I said, let's just win as many of those as we can every game and see how it plays out.

It's certainly been a team that we've figured it out together, but their level of improvement, if you had told me I would be sitting right here hosting last March I wouldn't have believed you and I would've believed you less in June.

But watching how June turned into July and how July turned into August and August turned into September, we were ready to rock.

Q. You said earlier this says as much about the players as the community. What do you expect from the fans, community and how can they impact these potential two games?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, huge, I don't know if you were here for our season finale against Duke, but there was someone who did a decibel reading at the game. It was higher in that game than at any moment in the men's games at the Smith Center year. Carmichael is obviously smaller and contains noise better, but I think that's what hosting is really special for in the women's game.

It rewards the fan bases that have found a way to urge their team along. And so there is not going to be an arena I don't think in any of the host sites that's not the well attended. It's so hard to win. I say this all the time. It's hard to win one college basketball game. To do it however many times we've done it this year, absolutely part of that has been our community.

For them to be able to give this back to them, give them March basketball, I do think that's one of the really special parts of our game. We need them. We need them to show up and show out. We know it's spring break for our students and the beginning of spring break for our own children.

We know there are other options, but people that chose the option to come into Carmichael are always rewarded.

Q. What does it mean to you and the team for Nyla to finally be able to host a first and second round matchup?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Well, it was great. When we were kind of in and not sure what was going to happen, I had said to Lanie Grant, what do you think? What are you looking forward to this weekend? She said, Coach I just want it for Nyla Harris so bad. That's just so our team.

So for her to have -- as we always say, she was the perfect person at the perfect time at the perfect program for us. You know, for her to have an opportunity to have Carmichael be a place where she can continue in March is remarkable.

For Indya I think for her, hometown kid, for a senior, you're judged a lot in this business. As a player you're judged a lot and I always say you have to look at who is judging you and value that accordingly.

When you have an opportunity to lead your team, to find way to host after 70% now has a Carolina diploma playing professionally, you did a lot right.

So for her to have an opportunity to play in front of her home community for another time couldn't be a better story honestly.

Q. I asked your players about this, too, how proud the program should be of establishing women's success here.

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah.

Q. (Regarding Dean Smith center.) I know the circumstances are different but they're talking about debate, tear down Dean or rebuild a new one. Sometimes the old school arenas have a longer tradition and been around longer. Can you comment about that, the history that you guys have preserved here?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, I think people keep talking about Michael Jordan and obviously his impact on our sport and his impact on this University can never be overstated. Also Charlotte Smith. Don't forget what she did in this building. Won a national championship and also wore No. 23.

I think there is a lot to be said for her. There was a whole lot of games that were won in here without me and losses, too, so the tradition and history and privilege of this building is remarkable.

But you always want to look forward, right? You don't want to look backwards in life. Sports have really changed. If you told any of us ten years ago that we would be in the NIL or transfer era you wouldn't believe it. The history and tradition is remarkable.

Fortunately I don't -- I kind of stay in my lane of decisions I get to make. I'll be happy to grow along with the business and play in a new arena. Be happy to enhance this one. Whatever the decisions are.

But I think what people want are good teams. Whether you play on the moon or in Chapel Hill they want good teams. Whatever we can go to maintain good teams, that's my job. I'll do that whether it's on the moon or in Chapel Hill.

Q. Courtney, you talked about this a little bit on Monday, but what was kind of that period between that loss to Louisville and now, like how have the past practices gone and what has been that message going

into this game tomorrow?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, we were playing so well. You know, we had won 13 or 12 of the last 13 games we played or whatever it was mathematically. We were playing so well.

We just played really poorly against Louisville. We weren't sharp in terms of our actions, pace wasn't very good, didn't separate well. It just was a team we didn't recognize honestly.

So I think that was actually a good thing. It allowed us to regroup and allows us to point out and see that there were areas that we were sliding and it kind of kept sliding, and so we -- they didn't go home. They stayed here.

We gave them a couple days off and got right back to it. We were able to use that film and a lot of different ways offensively and defensively and individually. The last time out we weren't very good, right, and you don't want the last time out for you not to be very good.

I think we got better. That's what we've done all year. It's what this team is really bought into. So we know that there is no bad teams left. There is no more left on the calendar, right? To play well is what you're required to do and we didn't do that in one of our kind of advance opportunities.

So we hope to make that different this weekend.

Q. Coach, Western Illinois, the opponent for the first round, 25 wins on the season, who do they remind you of that you might have played so far this year?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, they remind us a lot of South Dakota State. Brooklyn Meyer for them was a real problem, real priority for us. And we were in Cancun. They had really good guards. They could penetrate and shoot around her, but Brooklyn was averaging at the time closer to 25 points as well.

So we showed some film of how we defended both good and bad Brooklyn Meyer knowing that that's we're going to have to do with Castro a little bit. So that was helpful. Our schedule we felt like that was an advantage. I've also come from the mid-major as you know where people don't know as much about you but you know a whole lot about yourselves.

So this is a team we know is coming in with a ton of confidence. The people in that locker room have done a lot together. They know who they are. They've shown resilience and connectivity to be in this opportunity.

So we'll lean on that as well in an environment that I'm used to or I've done before.

Yeah, they remind me of South Dakota State. I feel very prepared for this game as well.

Q. Wondering if you had any thoughts, seems silly to me that North Carolina and Duke are hosting games the same day. (Mic cut out.)

COURTNEY BANGHART: It is unique. I think this happened last year as well when all three triangle teams hosted. I don't know how they go about planning. I'm guessing the committee puts together the very best, most accurate bracket they can and then ESPN then takes over game times and things like that.

That's my guess.

And so not always are those two things connected, whether it's for their scheduling or their people that are working. So I don't know exactly how that goes. Luckily they're close enough that if you want to be at both you'll find a way.

Yeah, I don't know how connected those decision makers are to the process.

Q. Just any mantras, mottos that your team has manifested throughout the season they're bringing to the tournament as motivation maybe?

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, I think they -- after that loss to Notre Dame, I can remember one other loss my first year at Princeton as a head coach that felt the same. It's something we don't do we often where we don't show up and get completely dismantled.

We played so poorly in that game. So from that point forward I didn't have anything to do with that. The team sort of came up with, it's us. What that means to them is that it's us. It's always us. Not what other people think about us.

I told them when I first started the season I started it with I'm not going to chose to read the article that's already been written about how we're not going to be as good defensively losing three of the best defenders I've ever coached.

I'm not going to read the article that we lost so much so it's a rebuild.

I'm not going to read those articles. You're going write your article. I think it took this team in their own unique

way to find the time and the right time to come up with what theirs was going to be. So every time we huddle up or say anything, it ends with, it's us.

They feel in their hearts and minds that it's us is enough. They've proven that. So since that Notre Dame loss when they shifted when their priorities and words and encouragement, what they were going to lean on, it's played out pretty well.

So it's from them by them and it's us.

Q. If you can pick out anything about this team that's different than any other team you've ever coached what would you say that would be?

COURTNEY BANGHART: That's a great question. I've been doing this so long it's almost embarrassing. I would say the thing about this -- every team is so incredibly unique, especially right now. Today will be practice No. 144. That doesn't include the games, so it's a very long season.

But in terms of the growth of our two seniors, you know, Indya's leadership who is kind of a behind-the-scenes guy who is kind of a guy that just wants to fit in with things, she has totally taken over this team in a remarkable way.

Of course and Nyla's decision brought in her courage to come. I think their resilience in not only dealing with how good I wanted them to be and how willing I was to make them be that good, how resilient they were through that. And then I don't know of any other team this loses three of its first five ACC games and does the win that they do.

I think the resilience of this group is remarkable. They have a positivity and desire to get better every single day that is palpable, so it's easy to pour into them.

I would probably say that.

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