

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

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Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA

Carmichael Arena

## North Carolina Tar Heels Coach Courtney Banghart

### Lanie Grant

### Nyla Harris

#### Media Conference

North Carolina 82, Western Illinois 51

COURTNEY BANGHART: Thanks for being here. What a great environment. We felt like these guys really earned the opportunity to bring basketball back to Chapel Hill, and Chapel Hill showed up with a loud crowd and a lot of energy.

There were some cobwebs, as you all saw, and that kind of -- it's amazing how rhythmic these athletes are. They hadn't had a game against another team for two weeks. And you could tell that. We were a little short in our shots. We were slow in our throwing and catching.

But it's hard to win a basketball game. I'm on record saying that. And to win one in March is even harder.

Grateful that these guys have the spirit that they have, and thrilled to be sitting here as the winning coach.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Lanie, what was working for you there in that first half? You and Nyla Brooks were really keeping the offense in it. What was working for you guys?**

LANIE GRANT: Yeah, we knew that they were going to collapse pretty hard on the guards' drives. So I think E and Indya did a great job of just finding the shooters, playing off too. Me and Brooks were told to get to the windows and shoot it when we were open.

**Q. Lanie, 4 of 19 on three pointers in the first half, and**



**then you and Elina came out and hit some quick ones in the third quarter. How much of a difference did that make?**

LANIE GRANT: It always makes a difference when you're making shots and you're hitting shots. All the coaches, all my teammates just continue to implore me to shoot the ball when I'm open, don't turn down open shots.

So they built a lot of confidence in me, and I pulled from that. If I miss two in a row, there is nobody on the team telling me to turn down the next one. Everyone says keep shooting.

Everyone on our team is capable of shooting the three, which is really special. When everyone is hitting, it really spaces out the defense, and it allowed -- you saw E got downhill a lot in the second half, in the fourth quarter got to the rim a little bit more. So helps when you're hitting shots.

**Q. Talk about the defensive effort. This team came in shooting 35 percent from three-point range, and 2 of 15. Lanie, can you speak to that, and Nyla as well?**

LANIE GRANT: We knew we were going to play really strong. Western Illinois's team -- there's not a team left in this tournament that isn't capable of making a run. We were very prepared for their key scorers. We were really tuned into No. 22. She's averaging close to 25 points a game. That was the main emphasis for us.

Once we stopped bailing them out on some jump shots and some fade-aways, we were able to play more straight up. I think Indya brought it for us. She picked up the energy in the second half. She was all over the place. She always is. That's just a testament to her leadership. But we all kind of feed off of her.

**Q. Nyla, first home tournament win. Can you talk to that? And, Lanie, Coach said that you really wanted a home game so Nyla can have one in the NCAA Tournament. Can you both attest to the home environment tonight and, Nyla, what it was like to get that home tournament win?**



NYLA HARRIS: Yeah, no, it was super electric. It was exciting to run out and just hear all the Carolina fans and it was -- I don't know, it was just a really soaking-in moment of, wow, we're actually here, we're actually playing. We've been waiting for this moment for two weeks.

And just hearing Lanie say that just means so much to me. But I just -- it was fun to play in Carmichael again. It always is. And to get the win again and be able to play again on Sunday is just fun.

LANIE GRANT: Yeah, I'll say March is special. This tournament is so special. But to be able to do it at home with your fans behind you, I think that adds everything. Like she said, hearing the support and hearing the love, and you want to do it, you want to do it for the community.

But like I said, we want Indya and Harris to have two more games. And we won this one so they get one more game at Carmichael, not just Senior Night. So that was one of our goals going into this season, we want to make deep runs in the playoffs, and we want to be able to host.

To be able to do that and look around and know we're doing it for two special seniors that have brought a lot to this program, it means a lot.

**Q. Like I asked Lanie, offense was struggling in the first half. Your mindset that last minute? You scored on an inside basket, then you got the offensive rebound, you put back in the last minute. What was your mindset in this last minute to spark the team?**

NYLA HARRIS: I think Western Illinois was really packing it inside, making it hard for the offensive rebounds to make a basket. I think it was important for me to get that because that was a little bit in my head in the beginning, just struggling a little bit.

And then I think getting that buzzer going into this second quarter was just good for our team as well to just keep the momentum flowing.

**Q. Nyla, Lanie mentioned Indya really leading the team. But also, I mean, you as a senior, how have y'all been able to step into a leadership role, especially playing here, home at Carmichael, and as you mentioned, you have that big second half?**

NYLA HARRIS: Yeah, I mean, coming here my first year and having a huge leadership role on a team that I'm new at, but having Indya help me with that was huge. Me and Indy have had a -- we have -- dang, why am I struggling to speak? Me and Indy have grown a special bond, and being able to lead this team to hosting this NCAA

Tournament is huge.

I think that, again, our leadership plays a huge role in this team in how we do, and I think in that second half me and Indy leaned into each other saying, as leaders, we don't want to go home. We want to bring the passion, the joy, whatever it takes to get this one. And I think that's what we did very well.

**Q. Y'all are a really young team. Lanie, you and Nyla had a great games. Can you talk to the experience and the mentality of the younger classmen to really help propel this team forward and make sure you guys have all five players on the court?**

LANIE GRANT: Yeah, we are a very young team. But I think that it kind of speaks to our leadership. Like I learned a lot last year coming into a team that was a lot of fifth-year senior heavy. So I learned about how to lead differently through them.

But I also think that especially Harris and Indya do such a great job of just pouring confidence into the younger kids. Myself included. Whenever they see me struggling, they're the first ones to pick me up. And it's just down the line.

Like I said, they just pour into other people. And that's one of the reasons why this team is so good. They're not just good personally, but they pull people along.

And the best teams are player led, and they've done a really good job about stepping into their roles, and they also do a great job of leaving the floor open for everybody on the team to have a voice and everybody to lead in their own authentic way, which is really special.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks so much, student-athletes, and congratulations on the win. Questions for Coach.

**Q. The defensive effort that you had against Western, what your strategy was and stopping their conference Player of the Year?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, if you take away the free throws, we held her to 12 points. We take great pride in taking away the other team's strengths. I think we've done that so many times this year.

And so I think we'll have to watch back how many of those free throws were things we could have controlled or things that were -- there's just a physicality that we play with in the ACC that's different maybe.

But I thought we were really disciplined in the third quarter. We were a little bit jumpy in the first quarter. But we

wanted to guard the arc with ball pressure, but we also wanted to make their best player have to work a lot harder.

She had to take 15 shots and turn the ball over six times, I thought we did a really good job on her.

Defense, rebounding, and ball control wins you a lot of games, and three-point shooting in our case. So we've got -- defense is something we can control, and I thought we've continued to really lock into that.

**Q. Can you just talk about the perimeter defense and the perimeter offense? You kept Western Illinois to 0 percent in the three going into the fourth quarter, and then can you talk about going 25 percent from the three on the offensive side?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Sorry about that, everybody. We sort of killed it at the arc today, didn't we? Yeah, I can talk about both. I give a lot of credit to the ACC. We've played nine teams during the tournament. We've played against really good guards night after night after night. And so iron sharpens iron.

So we feel like we've gotten better throughout the year because of our nonconference schedule and the ACC schedule. So you're not asking us to recreate a scheme. You're asking just to continue our progression of guarding our own and no islands and the way that we want to defend.

I think we were pretty disciplined. Again, I've got to look at those free throws. That's too many free throws to give up in March. But I've got to look at how much of that was controllable and how much was the way the game was called. I don't know.

And then I would hope we don't shoot 25 percent from three again. That would be below our average. When we look back at those shots, I think we'll like a lot of them.

And so I thought we kept -- it shows a lot of trust that they just kept in it. They kept taking the shots that we were getting. They were really compact in the paint. I would also be worried about our inside game. So they were sort of hedging their bets on our perimeter game, and we were a little bit in our cobwebs there.

I just wanted them to keep shooting, work it out. Yeah, sorry we gave you guys 25 percent. But we gave you 10 makes, and I know this group loves double-digit makes.

**Q. You mentioned a little bit of those cobwebs that first half offense, but Lanie and Nyla Brooks kept them in. Can you speak to their participation and their role in that first half to vault y'all to that big second half**

**lead?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, I thought Nyla Brooks has been -- she's gotten so much better throughout the year. I keep hearing that. I'll be out on Franklin Street or out to dinner, and someone will say, Oh, I love Nyla Brooks. She's gotten so much better. People love how she's defending. She's able to create basketball plays for other people now. She's such a joy.

I love the kid. I know you guys do too. And so I feel like I'm competing with you all to be number one in her heart. But she loves Carmichael. She's important to us. I love that she kept shooting because she took good shots.

And then Lanie is just a rock. She's the youngest kid on our team. We've got the seventh youngest team in Power Four, and she's the youngest still on our team. She's an absolute rock. I thought how she came out in the third quarter -- I didn't like our rebounding effort. When you watch that back, that will be the first three possessions she had a legitimate body on body.

She's just a kid I have great trust for. She's a two-way player. And all she cares about is winning. And when one of your best players only cares about winning, things fall in line.

Those two were huge tonight. I love that everyone played. Everyone got their hands on the ball and their feet on the court. In March, it feels like it gives us even more options going into Sunday.

**Q. Ciera and Blanca are both bigger girls, but they managed to stay between and Nicastro and the basket consistently. I don't know how important that was, if you thought going into the game you might have to switch (indiscernible). How important was that to the game?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, we did a little bit of both. When we were big, we wanted to stay and force tough ones. And, again, I think some of those fouls happened in that. And then we were able to go small and switch around and just keep bodies in front of the ball.

I love that our guys gave me a lot of options. I mean, Blanca and Ciera are imposing physically. They're 6'5", 6'6", and they're strong. And it just got a lot of things in the paint that are hard to work around.

So we wanted to kind of give that look, and then we also did a lot of switching and played a little bit smaller. And so our goal is just wear on you in lots of different ways. And I think over the course of a game -- again, if you take out

their free throws, which I know is not really fair, but if you do, give up 36 points in March, it's pretty good.

**Q. I don't want to ask you about Xs and Os with Maryland because I know you have a scout to do and stuff, but it's a big-time matchup. A lot of history between these two programings. What do you think the environment will be like on Sunday? And not as a coach, but as a basketball fan, how excited are you just to be a part of that matchup?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, so cool. I remember -- so we played them my 30-and-0 year. So that year was the year I was -- actually the Naismith and had all those cool accolades happen, and they're the team -- they were the only loss that season.

What Brenda has done -- consistency in this business is really hard and being at one place because to be good you've got to fight for your program. So you actually wear people out. And the fact that she's been able to be so loved at Maryland and win so many games consistently is remarkable.

And she's one of those in the business that truly does root for other people. So she's also one of the better people in our business. So that's really fun.

But I know that I remember being at the Final Four when I was a young coach, I was out way too late, so I barely stayed awake for the game. But watching her win a national championship and being a fan of the ACC, how fun this game is for the community.

And I know I'm in charge of it now, but there's a lot of people that played before me and coached before me that remember this rivalry in the same way.

It should be a great environment. I think Sunday, I don't know the game time yet, but I think there will be even more than were here today. I hope the students are back from spring break.

But what a -- that's what March is about, these match ups like this that can't always happen, and when they do, you just want to buckle up and watch.

**Q. (Off microphone) Nyla, her first in the NCAA Tournament, and Indya with all of her family being here, local kid. Can you speak to what that means for you and the program to get that for them?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: It's such a unique thing in the women's game that you can do that. It rewards -- it basically rewards the fan bases and the schools that have

invested in your sport to let you play at home. Because if you're good enough, you have that opportunity. And to be good enough, you probably have to be well supported, both from an administrative level and a fan base level.

We feel like it's a gift that we give back to the community now two years in a row. I think these kids are so in it they don't -- they don't necessarily have the wide lens that us elders do. And so I don't know if it's totally hit Indya that what she's been able to do, what she'll remember is that in her senior year, she hosted in Carmichael.

I don't think that's where she's at. But we'll make sure that she recognizes that you're sort of judged in how you do when you're in charge. And she's in charge of this team.

And what she's been able to do to get it back home when -- remember a lot of her running mates, and include Reniya being out, and then all the kids that graduated last year, she was the one that's been left. And the way she's been able to galvanize the young guys and give them confidence and be consistent with what we need is remarkable. She doesn't have the perspective yet to totally get it.

I remember when I left Princeton, it was hard. It was where I met my family, had my kids. We were rolling. It's a place that loved me. It was really hard to leave. And you hope, when you take over a new job, it's going to be what you want.

And the one thing I felt at Princeton is I'd never get a chance to host. And so I wanted it to be really cool, I really wanted to do that. And so to be able to do it two years in a row means more to me than I can articulate because I had won tournament games at Princeton. It wasn't about that what. It was about what can I do different? Can I host an NCAA Tournament game, get to a Sweet 16, Elite Eight, Final Four?

And to do it the last two years, it's really hard to do. So I'm really proud of the kids I've been coaching and the kids that have trusted me in this process.

**Q. As your players were speaking, I saw you taking a lot of notes. I wonder what those notes are, what you do with them once you're done with this?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: I've watched a lot of Maryland, so I was writing some notes down. I've got the team here, I've got to show them film after they eat. I've got that scout ready. I was just remembering some of the things that are going to be consistent with today that I'm going to carry over.

I'm a little bit boring because, as I told the team just now, I

said I don't have a lot to say. I'll have a lot to prepare you for. Usually when I'm writing it's about basketball.

**Q. Yesterday you said this is the hardest you've been on a team ever. And especially with such a young team, can you speak to the resiliency and discipline of those players, especially with Nyla Brooks and Lanie Grant to come out strong in the first half?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: They let me be really hard on them, and they didn't shrink. I looked at Indya and Nyla Harris, and I told them: I'm going to give you my very best. I'm going to find a way to get the best of your young guys because you don't have the time. This group is going to be really good over time, but you need them to be good now.

And so every time I was hard on them, they just pointed inward, both of them. Like, there was no -- well, maybe they did it behind my back, but it wasn't like, Oh, I don't like Coach. It was like, We have to be better, guys. She's showing us, she's telling us.

And then the younger guys, they're just eager. Like Lanie is a rock and Nyla Brooks wants to be the star. You can go right on down the line. There's a lot of trust in our operation, me, them, them, me, and our coaching staff.

So when you love somebody, they know it. And if they know it, then they'll take whatever message you have in whatever way you share it. And you have to earn that. But we've earned it because they've earned it. They've earned the time that we put into them, and they've earned the results.

So whatever this -- this team needed me to be hard on them. It's exhausting. It's not really in my personality. But they needed me to be hard on them, and it worked.

**Q. Do you change the game day routine from the normal home game during the regular season?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, so we actually stayed in a hotel, quite honestly just because it's easier for their nutrition. And then also the film, I'd have to have them all come back to Carmichael tonight to watch more film.

They're all there. It's just like you're herding cats. It's easier to pull together. It's not because they're distracting on campus. That's just not -- these guys are wired in. I'm not worried about any of that.

It's honestly easier to make sure they stay on what they're trying to do, and then you show them film. And then they're not worrying about parking before they get to practice. We're just all on the bus.

So that is a little bit different. We did that last year, and it worked. So we did it again this year.

But otherwise, from a prep standpoint, whatever practice time I'm given tomorrow -- I'll usually get to pick it. So I don't get to pick it, that's annoying. But whatever practice time I'm given, that will be the same.

It be will the same structure in terms of your head has to understand before your body does. Once your head understands, if you don't do it, it wasn't important enough to you. It's really basic.

And so my job is to make sure they have very clear understanding of how we need to play to win. And if they do, if they do it, it mattered enough to them. If they don't, then it just didn't matter enough. And I can't worry about that. So the preparation will be tonight. It will tomorrow. And then the game plan will be solid.

**Q. You talked about it a little bit, but I know Lanie mentioned having a lot of fifth- and sixth-years last year, she kind of learned from them. How have you seen her learn, but also how have you seen Indya and Nyla Harris kind of teach the younger guys in terms of leadership? How have you seen those guys grow in terms of leadership?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: I think the biggest thing is I really believe that authenticity is our own superpower. So I'm not going to coach any other way than what's authentic to me.

So if you look at how Maria or Alyssa or Lexi Donarski led our team, it's very different than how Nyla Harris and Indya lead our team. But it's authentic to who they were. And you can get behind that. You can trust the consistency of that.

So Indya's journey has been very authentic, right in front of our very eyes. So how she's gone through confidence and imperfection and desire and all the things, it's easy to get behind.

So it's remarkable what Lanie has done. She gave up her senior year of high school. I don't know if you guys know. I was at her high school game for her high school state championship, and I was coaching -- we had just lost in the ACC tournament, and we had missed like 1,012 free throws, and she went 14 for 15 from the free-throw line. She had 39 points.

I texted her mom, and I was like, God, she'd help us -- I was going to text her dad, but he was coaching, and I

texted her mom, and I said, God, she'd help me right now.

And they said well -- 48 hours later, they were like, what do you think? I was like, well, if you're in, I'm in.

So giving up your senior year of high school is a big deal. And so she's 19 years old. It's really remarkable what she's done and how she's contributing.

And she absorbs everything around her. She absorbs the part of Lexi and Alyssa and Maria and Indya and Nyla Harris that she wants to be, but I keep reminding her, your authenticity is your superpower too.

So I think she's been able to absorb but not lose who she is.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, that's all the time we have today. Thanks so much for joining us.

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