

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - UNC Greensboro vs USC

Friday, March 21, 2025

Los Angeles, California, USA

Galen Center

UNC Greensboro Spartans Coach Trina Patterson

Media Conference

TRINA PATTERSON: I think we have a very talented team. I think this team is the most mentally tough team that I've coached. We are mentally tough and experienced. We have depth. We don't have a lot of one-trick ponies, players that can only do one thing.

We have players that can do multiple things. Then we play defense and that's what we been talking about all year. We been talking about the fact we have to travel with our defense.

So with that, we have had an incredible season, incredible players, great people, and here we are. Here we are. The goal was to get to a championship this year and here we are and excited about this opportunity.

Q. Throughout the season you guys have actually had a rebounding edge over most of your opponents. USC is similar. How much of an emphasis have you put on your players with making sure they get boards and trying to control the rebounds to affect obviously second-chance points and defensive opportunities for you guys?

TRINA PATTERSON: That's a good question. We have four ways that we describe Spartan basketball. It's like the late great John Wooden. He has a pyramid of success. So our pyramid of success starts with the base, and that's defense.

So we try to defend like our lives depend on it.

Second would be rebounding. So rebounding is one of the core values of our program, and so with that, you see that we have a rebounding edge over most of our opponents, even couple of the Power 4 that we've played. I think we out-rebounded Georgia and out-rebounded Wake Forest.



So that's core. We look at that as opportunities. Opportunities would be second-chance points for us. Would be our offensive rebounds. Khalis Cain is an elite offensive rebounder, one of the top in the nation; very difficult to box out; very active.

And then we tend to send three to the boards. So we even have some guards who would like to get in there and get O-boards. Rebound is something we focus on in practice daily, our rebounding drills. It is so crucial to give yourself a chance. So you can't run until you rebound.

The third phase would be to run. And pace is something that we love as a coach. This year we haven't had the pace we've had in the past, but we've had success. So we just have a different opportunity.

Our different opportunities for more chances would be steals. We are tending to get more steals than normal this year.

And then the last piece would be execution. So execution is ball security. Executing on defense would be not fouling. We're one of the top teams in the country with not fouling, understanding what a good shot is.

And so when I say that rebounding is just a part of it, but it's so important. We absolutely -- that's what we look at the stat sheet every day.

Q. Can you talk about your opponent for tomorrow and what you see in USC?

TRINA PATTERSON: Yes, USC is a great team with a great player, but not just one great player. They're one of the fastest teams in the country.

We have to really focus on what is important now. We been really talking about that as we been in this postseason, period. The third part of the season is postseason.

What's important now for us would be transition defense. Transition defense, getting back, and getting the ball stopped. What's important for us with this, they have a



tremendous relentless defensive team, defensive rebounding team.

And offensive rebounding team.

So we have to really box out their key offensive rebounders. They send four to the board, so we have to make contact early and we want to rebound by committee. We challenged our guards to get five rebounds.

All of them. You know, not just Khalis. Not just our 4s, backup center Yacine. To really focus on rebounding and giving them one shot.

So they're great. They can shoot it, but I really believe 40% of the time they believe they're going to get the O-board. We have to decrease that number.

Then we have to stop a phenomenal player, phenomenal player. We have to crowd her. We have to try to take what she likes to do. Many people have tried. I can tell you she will not be alone. There is not going to be single coverage.

When there is the ball screen action, we have a plan and our players understand that during the postseason you have to be more focused and you have to have elevated execution.

And that's on both sides of the floor.

And so, yeah, to prepare for this really good team at home, we're going to be really focused. And we tell our players that we don't just play hard; we compete.

We don't just play hard. We're going to compete and we did that in practice every day.

Q. It was very apparent the mental toughness and confidence your players have when they were here earlier. Talk about how you instilled that in them. You guys went to Puerto Rico earlier. I know they understand how to be away from home and the comforts of North Carolina. Can you talk about what you did to prepare them to make this trip, this journey, and obviously the concept of moving further than this?

TRINA PATTERSON: Absolutely. For them, like I said we're older, experienced. Many of these players are not -- they're not from North Carolina. We have players from outside of the United States.

We have players from -- we have two from California so it's a homecoming for -- not from Southern Cal from North Cal. Khalis Cain is from San Jose and Makiah Asidanya, who she told me she played against JuJu in her AAU years.

She is from the northern part of the state.

So I think that the fact that they even came across the country to play basketball is great. Players now are just traveling. I think it's mentality. Like Jayde Gamble, she's a dog. Like she's a dog. She's always had to be. And so she carries that mentality for our team.

Khalis Cain, very physical. Very confident. We just believe that like I said you have to compete. There is no fear. We're just all going to play the game.

I think our coaching -- we have one the best coaching staffs in the nation, and so I believe that our coaches, -all of our coaches have played in the NCAA or coached in the NCAA.

So we can give them some comfort. I played in the NCAA as player; coached in the NCAA.

Cetera played in the NCAA. Alex Miller played in the NCAA. Fred Applin coached in the NCAA.

So we can give them some experiences, but to be here is just an incredible experience, and so we don't take it lightly. We're going to compete. We understand how significant it is for our program, our administration, UNCG. It's going to be a great game.

Q. You guys played a few Power 4 teams: North Carolina, Georgia, Wake Forest. You played them early in the season in non-conference. What are some of the things that you guys have learned along the way and improved on, those mistakes that you made early on that you improved on or some of the things that you loved about it that you continue to instill in them?

TRINA PATTERSON: That's a great question. We learned some things about the game that even surprised me. When we look back at some of the analytics of the game we found that some of the teams that we played the best were those games, the analytics show that our offensive efficiency was very good in those games.

And so what we learned is the type of shots that we take our players just start to buy-in. So we got edge better. For instance, we're looking for rim, free, or three. We are looking for rim shots.

So we had to convince some of our players to stop taking the mid-range. Maybe they were taking them a little earlier. As the season progressed they started taking the type of shots that would give them the best results.

We said, you know, continue to practice on your threes.

So we have multiple players who can shoot the three point shot, which stretches the defense, which causes an opportunity to drive.

We said, just stop fouling. Like don't give your opponent the opportunity to get the type of shot that you're trying to get. So let's make sure we focus daily on defensive principles of how we escort players down the lane and stay disciplined when they're at the rim.

We've gotten better at our free throw shooting. We just are more mature and understand the game. It's such a reward to have older players who are experienced that understand and then apply.

And now we are where we are. We've seen many games this year where we've seen single digit scoring in the fourth quarter. Multiple in our conference. They know you. Everyone knows what you're doing.

I just think our team is -- they just keep getting better. As a coaching staff, that's what you want. You want to say, man, you're learning. Lessons learned; move on; let's get better and keep growing.

I think that's one of the things we've seen playing them early, coming to January, floating into February on a high, consistent growth, 14 wins, 15 wins straight, and we're trajecting in the correct way.

Q. Question on this historic season. I asked the student-athletes also. What does it mean as you build this program and what does it mean to the community around the campus and all that? How have you felt that?

TRINA PATTERSON: Absolutely. University of North Carolina Greensboro, we love the fact from our chancellor to our athletic director and our athletic department, we're all family.

So to move the program to a level where we got the championship has been tremendous for not only our team, but our community and the university.

Personally, it's just something great. As a coach you always want to do it. It's so hard to do. Never happened to me as a player, so you get a chance as a player. Do you get a chance as a coach, as an assistant coach? Yes.

But to do it as a head coach, it is just tremendous. I am blessed. Thank God for the opportunity.

We want to keep building on it. Want to make it consistent. I think we're at a place now with our players, our recruiting,

that we have an opportunity to continue the growth.

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