

# Atlantic Coast Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 7, 2025

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

**Duke Blue Devils**

**Coach Kara Lawson**

**Oluchi Okananwa**

**Reigan Richardson**

Postgame Press Conference



Duke 61, Louisville 48

**KARA LAWSON:** Proud of the team's effort. Any win in March is a good win. It doesn't matter how it looks or what you do. This is such a difficult tournament, and Louisville is a terrific team. Formidable opponent for us.

We started the game off so well defensively. I thought the first half was a great defensive effort by us, and then they made a run. That's what good teams do. I was really proud of how we settled ourselves back down. We got a little sped up, made some uncharacteristic plays, but we settled ourselves back down, and that's what you have to do in March. You have to be able to handle another team's run and come back, and we did that with some winning plays.

I thought these two up here were really pivotal for us winning. Oluchi making plays and finishing. I thought Reigan's two threes late when we had gotten a little wobbly there offensively steadied us. They were big time shots. Just pleased to be moving on.

**Q. I wanted to ask you about how critical -- I saw you had 12 points in the second chance and 13 off of fast breaks. Oluchi, you had some critical ones in that. Could you talk a little bit about how critical those stats were to that first lead you guys got and maintained for the first half?**

**KARA LAWSON:** Transition was a point of emphasis for us on both sides of the ball. I'm very proud of the 13 points that we were able to get in transition. But I'm more proud of the zero that they got, or didn't get.

That was something that we talked about that we needed to try to limit their transition game. They have so many athletic players, so I thought to win that in this battle was a big reason why we won the game.

**Q. Coach, we talked back in November about Toby Fournier, and you mentioned that she's learning the game. Could you talk about what's impressed you about her ability to learn and adapt to the game so quickly this season?**

**KARA LAWSON:** Yeah, I think as a freshman, Toby is no different than other freshmen in that way. It's just a year-long basketball course is what it is. There are certain maybe subjects that are more challenging for you in the beginning, and then you get the reps and you get to play and then you get into conference play and that's a different level.

I think what impresses me about Toby is she has the ability to rise to the level of the game and of the matchup. She makes plays for us. She's been incredibly productive for us this season and very efficient, as well. She finishes.

Her rebound has ticked up as of late, which we've really needed the rebounding.

So I think just that, her ability to kind of meet the level of the game and the level of the opponent is a great quality to have in a freshman.

**Q. Right towards the end of that final quarter, you had a quick fast break and then the ball was maintained on your side of the court because of that full-court press and then you got that critical deflection. Talk a little bit about what it's like competing in that full-court press and how you think that contributes to your game as a team?**

**OLUCHI OKANANWA:** Yeah, of course. Really with this team, I love playing with this team, especially when it comes to defense because we kind of give off each other's energy and each other's intensity, and when we're all locked in and we all have that one goal, it's like we're unstoppable.



**Q. Could you add a little bit about how critical that press is to you guys' overall game and how you define your team?**

KARA LAWSON: I think our pressure is part of our DNA, really. It's part of who we are. I love it because I think it speaks to what Oluchi spoke of. It speaks to togetherness, a group, and everyone being bought in to win because you can't have a one-player press, you can't have a two-player press. You can't have a good defense if only three players are willing to play it. It takes all five, and they all five played critical roles.

I'm fortunate as a coach to coach very versatile players defensively so they can switch and guard different types of players. We always challenge them to say don't be the weak link defensively on our team. Well, it's hard not to be the weak link because there's a lot of good defenders so they have to practice hard to not be that.

These two young women and the rest of the women in the locker room have really just taken to that, and that allows us to get those transition points, too. If we play good defense, we get to get out and run.

**Q. Reigan, both the other women up there have talked about the defense. What do you see in the other team? Louisville shot only 32 percent. Do you see that defense wearing them down as you get into the second, third, fourth quarter and the fact that they just don't want to have to work as hard offensively as you guys forced them to?**

REIGAN RICHARDSON: I mean, Louisville is a great team offensively. The main thing for us was just to apply pressure, and today we applied the best pressure that we probably ever did this season, and ultimately it allowed us to get stops on the other end.

**Q. Coach, could you just address that defense and the fact -- how hard is it to get everybody to buy into that? Obviously you're recruiting at a very high level, very good offensive players, as well. But to get them all to buy in to what you want to do defensively.**

KARA LAWSON: Well, I don't think I do much of anything except recruit the right players. If you think that someone just putting a uniform on is going to make them be relentless and competitive and all that, that's not how it works. You have to go find that. That's something we look for. We look for players that have this insatiable appetite to play hard and give great effort.

So that's not something I had to do. They came this way.

They came this way. This is how they were raised. This is how they were raised in the game by their youth coaches, by their high school coaches, and we try and augment those strengths that they have and we try to grow them and make them better and increase their understanding of the game, their basketball IQ when they're here with us.

There's not really much that I can take any credit for. It's really the players, and then my assistant coaches are phenomenal teachers, so they're the ones that are really the -- I don't know if they're geniuses, you guys, my assistants, but they're the ones that are teaching them and coaching individual film with them and growing. So it's really that partnership to me that takes our program special. It's the type of young women in our program and then it's the staff that I have.

**Q. This question is for either player. Suffering a defeat to Louisville early in the season, your only home loss at Cameron, was this game personal for you?**

REIGAN RICHARDSON: I wouldn't say it's personal. It's just another one of those games. Louisville is a great team. Just being able to compete on the court with them was amazing. Yes, there's going to be trash talking. That's just where the game is. But ultimately we both have fun out there on the court.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Yeah, I mean, I would just say kind of starting postseason, it's like a clean slate now. We're addressing every single game that we play with the same intensity, the same competitive spirit.

**Q. Coach, as you all get ready for 2:30 tomorrow against Notre Dame, how do you take the emotions from this game and get ready for a battle tomorrow, a team that you lost to in the regular season but you get a new slate tomorrow night? What's your impression of that game tomorrow?**

KARA LAWSON: Oh, Notre Dame is a phenomenal team, very complete. They've had a great season. Obviously won the regular season along with NC State. We understand the task that's in front of us.

Honestly, it's really like get back to the hotel as quickly as we can, so if y'all doesn't want to ask any more questions, that would be great. We'll get these guys dinner, get them off their feet, get a good night's sleep, and then come out and play.

Honestly, this is the greatest time of year. You get to play and then you go to sleep, you wake up, you play again. This is what you want. You want to be in March basketball.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

You want to be playing meaningful games, and man, we've got a meaningful game tomorrow to play for an opportunity to play for an ACC championship. Both us and Notre Dame have that opportunity. If we win the game tomorrow, we're going to play for an ACC championship. If that doesn't get you fired up, I don't know what else would.

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