

# Atlantic Coast Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 8, 2025

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

North Carolina Tar Heels

Coach Courtney Banghart

Maria Gakdeng

Lexi Donarski

Postgame Press Conference



NC State 66, North Carolina 55

COURTNEY BANGHART: What a great environment. Have to apologize, we just didn't play very well. You can't not play well in March. You can say that any detail you want, but we just didn't play well enough.

There were times where we played hard enough, but just none of our guys, myself included, we just weren't good enough today. We regroup and have another chance.

**Q. Coach, a non-game related question, but Greensboro has been the home of the ACC women's for years. All indications are that that won't be the case at least next year and maybe the year after. Reflect on what Greensboro has meant to you, your program, your players, just the whole idea of women's college basketball.**

COURTNEY BANGHART: I'm not sure I'm in a position to really talk much about kind of what it means to the program. There's been a lot of really good Carolina teams well before me who I'm sure they should speak to some of the memories. Ivory would be a good example of people that have had really good experiences here.

I haven't yet had my great experience here, so we'll hopefully have a chance to come back and do that.

But the people of Greensboro, they do it the right way. I feel like I should send a Christmas card to half of the escorts. They're always so kind. It's a great environment here. I know that a lot of these schools can drive, a lot of the ACC schools can drive, which means our fan bases can drive, which means that there's more fans here.

At the same time, I know there are plenty of league schools that are saying it's an advantage to the North Carolina schools.

I think all I'd say about that is oftentimes the North Carolina schools also have been higher in seedings, so yeah, they're also some of the better teams. I mean, that's part of it, right?

The people have been great. I think there are people far more -- have won a lot more games than me at Carolina that should speak about the experience of winning the thing because I have yet to do it.

**Q. What did they do to take Reniya out of her game, and what did they do to keep Indya at bay until the last few minutes?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, obviously they're a really good team. They've got the 1 seed in the tournament by just their collective play. They've got three really dynamic guards. They've got improving post players. Just a really good team.

We just didn't play very well. I'd love to make excuses and that means I didn't coach very well, right, because obviously this is nothing that we do -- this particular team, nothing we do is alone.

I didn't coach very well. Our players didn't play very well. That's just an honest statement. I don't know if there was anything -- we liked their coverage and we knew that was going to ice, we knew they would be in drop. We're pretty good in that coverage. We were excited about this matchup. We've obviously beat them before.

We just really didn't play very well. You could say we didn't shoot well. We didn't shoot well either, right? It's hard to win games when you don't shoot well. I don't even know what it was. Felt like we wouldn't hit water if it fell off a boat, right? But I also don't think we just played very well, quite honestly.

That's why I started with an apology because there was a



lot of people here that were excited about two heavyweights, and I don't think we brought our part of that today.

**Q. Courtney, how hard was it to handle State physically? It seemed like they were getting every rebound, that they were all over you guys.**

COURTNEY BANGHART: That would probably be a better question for our players. We missed so many shots, so that's how they got so many defensive rebounds. The offensive rebounds were tied. I don't think they out-rebounded us in that way.

I don't know. I honestly -- I know it's always fun to have a good story, so I'm trying to help. But we just didn't play very well, guys. I wish I had more answers. Maybe these kids do. But when we got into the rim, we didn't finish well. When we had open threes -- I think we airballed three three-pointers.

This is high level Division I basketball. We just didn't play very well. I don't know if it was their physicality. I felt like Florida State was pretty physical and they were pretty physical the last time we played them. NC State were pretty physical. I think that's what the No. 1 defensive team in the league, people say about us, we're very physical.

We just didn't play very well. Believe me, I wish I had a better answer. That I can assure you of.

**Q. You guys closed 17-7 in the first half and then State got it back up to plus 17. How critical was that third quarter where they got that separation back up?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, I think we -- I said in the locker room, I think there were plenty of people here in Greensboro that thought we were going to lay down and die, but that's not what we do. That's just not us.

We just possession by possession is how we operate, and there's no quit in this group. We cut it to seven and then we missed that lay-up. Just things like that, we just couldn't quite get over the hump today.

You've got to play well in March. There is no margin of error. You've got to play well in March, and we look forward to another opportunity to do that.

**Q. Lexi, I asked you this yesterday, but another 11-minute stretch where you guys are not able to hit a shot. What do you do to make shooting easier on yourself or try to get better looks so you can see one go through the basket?**

LEXI DONARSKI: Yeah, I think we had a little stretch in the first half that we were taking a little bit too quick a shots for how contested they were.

Not that we're not capable of making them, but I think as a team, we're better when someone wins the paint and kicks it out or off a post feed or open in transition, and I feel like those weren't the shots we were we were getting for that little stretch in there where we were struggling.

So just really thinking about what we need to do to get the best shot for the team, and I feel like when we did that later on, we did make a couple more shots when we did that.

**Q. Courtney, the last time y'all played, you held NC State to just four points in the second quarter. That was their lowest season. What changed, because they scored 16 in the first three?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, we didn't play well. Obviously we had Alyssa back so we felt like we were better defensively than we were the last time we played them.

I'm sure what Wes will say is the last time we played them they didn't play very well. These are two really good teams, and if you play ten times I think you're going to like kind of both sides of that.

We just -- it wasn't tactical. We didn't change our coverages. We didn't feel like we needed to. They played their same coverages, as well.

Quite honestly we just didn't play well enough. I know that's a terrible answer. It's going to be tough for you guys to write a good story.

**Q. Obviously this one is over and you've got about 10 days to get ready for the next round. Anything in particular y'all want to work on?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, we need to step away from each other for a minute. I think we all just need a chance to breathe and to get everybody a little bit more rest. It's been three games in three days, three scouts in 24 hours and all that.

Part of it is rest, and then you get to use the next 10 days for and even more than that, you get to really look in totality at what your strengths are and ensure that you're staying in rhythm on your strengths and then look in totality at where your weaknesses are and how can you hide that on either side of the ball or build depth there where you might not be.

But I like the way this team is built. We've got a lot of options at a lot of spots. Again, it's so easy, and believe me, I'm as competitive as they come. You don't sign on for this industry if you're not. Win or lose, you're not defined by one game.

This team is a really good. They've won 27 basketball games. If you had told me at the beginning of the year we would be 27 and whatever we are I'd be like, awesome. That sounds great. Let's do it. Let's go into March.

So we not going to reinvent ourselves which we had to do last year because we got so injured. We only had six players. That's not the case. We're actually getting healthy now.

We'll just accentuate our strengths and work through a few things that I think we need to work through weakness -- wise, but not a whole ton, honestly.

**Q. You, Duke, and NC State all making the semis for the first time in about eight years and all going to host. It's pretty much concrete now that all three teams in the triangle are going to host.**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, it's just remarkable. I know that was something that we all collectively -- my first year here we had like a meet and greet or something and Joanne P was still the coach at Duke and Wes, and we were all were together and we were like, imagine if we all could host, and here it is.

That's really remarkable, and obviously I've said this all the time, it's great. You can share the expenses of ESPN, you can just come on down and move along through.

But really the body of work for you to live in the triangle and to watch three heavyweights play twice a week, we should get a cut of the taxes because we're helping the cost of living in the area just with how much on fire women's basketball is and the investment people are making in women's basketball. It's remarkable.

Now we'll be rooting for both of them to show how good our league is, and I know they'll be doing the same for us.

**Q. Maria, three games in three days. It's a brutal schedule and you've just got to fight through it, but during the game did you ever feel like fatigue set in for you guys?**

MARIA GAKDENG: I think when we're in the game I don't really feel it because of the adrenaline rush, but definitely when we settled down, but we do great with treatment,

getting our bodies right for the next day. I think we came prepared today, we just didn't follow through with a win.

**Q. Maria, I want to ask about the physicality of this game. You were battling a lot. Was this one of the more physical matchups you've had?**

MARIA GAKDENG: I think every game in the ACC is physical for me. I'm double-teamed. I'm pushed out of the post. I'm elbowed in the back every game. It's something I'm used to, but I knew coming into this game as a rivalry we're playing for a championship game, so playing with a little bit more grit today was a big part of it.

**Q. Coach, Ustby with two early fouls in the first quarter. Describe the amount of trust you have in her to keep her on the floor despite the foul trouble, and how does that affect the game plan going forward?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Well, they started to iso her and try to pick up her third and I was liking that they were playing iso ball. So I was like, all right, if I keep her in, you'll play iso ball, that works, because I trust her that she'll play straight up. I'm not going to comment on that. I don't need to be fined.

But I think she was able to just play vertically. I trust her to be able to do that. She knows the value to our team, and it forced them to play kind of one-v-one which allowed everybody else to settle into their gaps and all that.

**Q. Lexi, you were pretty clearly frustrated the whole game. Was that just the deficit that was getting to you or was it the foul calls?**

LEXI DONARSKI: I don't think I was very frustrated throughout the whole game. I feel like when we play together, we're good, and we made some runs back. I mean, I feel like I try to get as much out of my teammates as I can, so when we're getting down, I'm trying to get the energy out of everyone. I don't think it's frustration, I think it's more motivation and trying to bring us all together.

**Q. Maria, NC State has a very young post room that's two freshmen and a sophomore. All three of them almost fouled out trying to guard you. What were you noticing when you were in the paint?**

MARIA GAKDENG: I knew that part of the game plan was getting the ball inside, knowing that just getting into them, trying to finish over and they're a young group and they're improving year by year, but getting the ball to me, an experienced post player, and getting them in foul trouble early in the game was important to getting us going.

