

Atlantic Coast Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 8, 2025

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

NC State Wolfpack

Wes Moore

Madison Hayes

Saniya Rivers

Postgame Press Conference

NC State 66, North Carolina 55

WES MOORE: Just really proud of our defensive effort and our job on the boards. They're a great scoring team. They're a great rebounding team. I thought our players did a nice job of trying to take away strengths.

Madison did an excellent job with Ustby. She's one of the best rebounders ever. I thought Madison did a great job trying to keep her off the boards.

Kelly obviously a great scorer for them; I thought Saniya did an excellent job defending her.

Our posts, all three of them about fouled out trying to slow down the inside game there. But at the end of the day, pretty good job in there, as well.

Real proud of them. Transition is also a big strength of theirs, and they didn't get very many fast break points. All that is defensive. Proud of that.

Again, just a good solid team win.

Q. You beat a team that beat you; there's a chance you'll face a team you beat. The bottom line is how do you separate a revenge factor from simple preparation for a game?

WES MOORE: Yeah, this time of year, we don't talk about revenge. I never brought that up. It's all about right now, it's March. As I like to call it, March Gladness. It's that time of year, and these games are too important standing alone to worry about revenge.



Again, either way, as you mentioned, we've got to focus on preparation and taking away the things we want to take away from the other team and try and exploit things that we want to try to utilize.

Yeah, it's not really about that.

Q. The rumor or speculation, if you will, is that you won't be back here next year or the year after or whatever the schedule has. What has Greensboro meant to you, and how important is it to have an ACC Tournament here in town?

WES MOORE: Yeah, of course we don't know anything officially yet, but Greensboro has been unbelievable. I know everybody is going to say, well, sure you like it because you've got the fans that come over here and support you, and no doubt, that's awesome.

But I just think this is the ACC footprint. I know some teams now, we've got teams from all across the country, but to me, the ACC is Tobacco Road and all that stuff, and I just think it's so well supported here.

The Greensboro sports community, the volunteers, they make it a first-class event.

Obviously we love coming here.

Q. You always talk about how you want to let up under 70 points --

WES MOORE: 60.

Q. You let up under 60 and you were two points away from holding them to their lowest of the season, and you also held them to just five points in the first quarter. What were you noticing differently and how did you scheme that up?

WES MOORE: Yeah, again, I think our players did a great job of the scout, applying the scout. They've got some players that are unbelievable three-point shooters. They've got other players that are really hard to guard off the bounce, and you've got to try to take away their strength.



Now, they can score other ways, but you've got to try to take away their strengths. Like I said, a big emphasis was transition, trying to slow that down, and then second-chance points. I'm so proud of them. They carried those two things out unbelievably well and tried to, again, take away player strengths.

I think that was the whole key to having a good day.

Q. Aziaha James had a scary moment in the first quarter, went down hard, but came back early in that second quarter, immediately knocks down a three. What does it do for your team when you see her come back into that game and immediately start battling back, just the warrior mentality she showed today?

WES MOORE: Yeah, again, Aziaha, she's primetime. She loves the big stage and plays well when she's in those situations. Heck, these kids, they all went down against -- Saniya has been battling the flu all week. We didn't even know this if she was going to play yesterday. Really it was a game-time decision almost.

Then of course Madison got hit also in the head.

It's a tough game. It's a physical game out there.

Again, Carolina plays really hard, and they get after you, so there's going to be some contact.

But again, yes, definitely good to see her be able to come back in and pick right up where she left off. Glad all of them are okay.

MADISON HAYES: We're glad that she came back in. She's a huge impact to our offense and defense. I think she did a great job defensively. We just picked up the slack until she came back, and when she came back, she gave me my assist off of a three, so...

SANIYA RIVERS: Yeah, we knew 'Zai wasn't going to stay down too long. Like Coach said, she is made for these moments, made to play on these stages.

It just created a big momentum shift for us, and we're just glad that she was able to come back in and physically finish it out with us.

Q. Today was a continuation of the growth and development of the freshmen, the contributions they're making. I think you can add Mallory Collier. She helped bridge that gap with the foul trouble to get you to the end. If you don't mind all three of you speaking to that, especially the importance of what they did with

that foul trouble.

SANIYA RIVERS: Yeah, I just think it speaks to how everybody just stays ready when their name or number is called. Mallory came in ready, Lorena, Tilda, Zam. They all came and gave us big minutes, especially the post players. They were in deep trouble today, foul trouble.

So just everybody being ready when their number was called. Big contribution, and we're just proud because that's what we expect from them.

MADISON HAYES: I agree with everything 'Niya said. I think Tilda when she fouled a couple times even in the first half, Lorena came in and stepped in. She didn't play yesterday, but she was ready to come in and play today, and it showed. She had big buckets later in the game.

Mallory, like you said, bridged that gap for us, had a big and-1 for us.

I'm really proud of them. They came a long way from the beginning of the season to now, and it just shows their growth, as well?

WES MOORE: Yeah, I thought Tilda got off to a great start, scored a few buckets there when we really needed it early in the game, including knocking down a three. Then Lorena ended up 10 points, 2 for 2 from the foul line; did some really good things; 4 for 5 from the field.

Again, her length and all I think helps down there defensively. And then Mallory, when I put her back in, I said, hey, we've got to have rebounds, and she went in there and got a big offensive board and a stick-back when we really needed it.

Yeah, all three of them, we needed them all today because I think they all about had four fouls on them, so we needed everything we got out of them.

Q. Playing three games in three days, how do you mentally and physically prepare to play in back-to-back games, especially with huge implications on the line with essentially having the potential to win a championship tomorrow?

SANIYA RIVERS: Yeah, we've prepared for this since the summer when we were out on that track dying running them laps like we was track stars.

So we're built for moments like this. We've prepared mentally and physically. Obviously after games like this we'll go get recovery. It helps that we had the earlier game first so we have longer to recover and prepare and to

scout.

We'll have time to get some rest tonight. I think Coach mentioned we lose an hour, so he's cutting our time back saying we need to get in bed early, so we're definitely going to do that and be recovered for tomorrow.

Q. Courtney was here talking about looks like all three of the triad teams are going to get to host this year -- sorry, triangle teams. She said when she first got the job that she talked to you and it was Joanne at the time about how cool that would be and what a moment that would be. Can you talk about this moment for women's basketball in this area?

WES MOORE: Yeah, I think it's great. It just shows, again, we talk about the ACC and the triangle area and the Tobacco Road, again, all that. I think it's pretty cool. All three teams have had great years and some big wins.

To be able to host is special. Only 16 teams in the country, and to have three of them within 30 minutes of each other is going to be special, no doubt.

Q. For the players, in a similar vein, you have a chance to win a championship battle, the first for this program, since 2022. What would it mean for this year's group to bring an ACC title back to Raleigh?

MADISON HAYES: I think it's going to be amazing. I think just obviously for us vets, me and Zaza were a part of that 2022 team, and just having that much impact on the game now that we're vets and now 'Niya is a part of the team, I think it's a special moment for the freshmen to feel that moment and be a part of something great.

And that's what Coach Moore built before we came, and we're going to keep building his legacy here at NC State.

The fans here are amazing, so giving that back to them, as well, will be amazing.

SANIYA RIVERS: For me personally, I've never won a conference tournament. When I was at freshman at South Carolina we ended up losing to Kentucky and then here unfortunately I didn't get to win it with them. I think tomorrow is just going to be special because like Madison said I get to win it with a team that I love so much and appreciate, so I think it's going to be fun.

Q. I have a two-parter for Saniya and Coach. I'm curious how you guys came to the game so physical minded against an equally physical Tar Heel team. How did you just key in on those UNC stars and execute your scout against them?

SANIYA RIVERS: Yeah, we prepared for this all season. Like I said, again, it starts in the summer getting in the weight room, being on the track. As far as the mental aspect, that's a tough team, like Coach mentioned, give them their credit.

But I just think we wanted it more tonight and it showed. There was one point I was switched onto Ustby just to give Madison a blow, and I was thinking, oh, man, okay, she's a little strong, but I got to be a little tougher mentally and physically. I actual got me one good box out and I was proud of myself. I was like, okay, Madison, that's enough. It's time to come back in now.

But just overall I'm really proud of my effort, my physicality mentally and physically. I was telling someone earlier that I take a lot of pride in defense, especially getting ready for the next level, and I know they're going a lot stronger there. So just being able to take strides like I did today I think is a great start.

WES MOORE: Again, it's like any time when you're putting together a scout, you're trying to take away certain players' strengths. It doesn't always work. You don't always -- again, we don't have a ton of time to prepare for these games. We usually do a walk-through in the evening, watch film, and then do a walk-through in the morning and then watch film.

But also we just played them a couple of weeks ago, so you kind of know what the strengths are, who does what, and try to take those things away.

As far as the physicality, it's March, and we've got seniors, grad students here. They know the importance of it. They're playing hard. It's going to be physical from here on out, so you've just got to prepare for that.

Q. Madison and Saniya, you both are guards that play in that forward position. You both took turns playing the 4. You both guarded Ustby. You each had eight rebounds and a couple of blocks. Is there a certain amount of pride you take playing out of position and providing that spark to the team?

MADISON HAYES: You know, obviously I was a 3 player last year and with losing Mimi and River, when Coach Moore asked me -- not really asked me but just threw me in there at the 4, I think just sacrificing for my team and just knowing that I have to be able to give something.

I'm going to be undersized, everybody tries to pick on me, but I take that seriously and I take that personally, and I did what I had to do tonight, and I feel like 'Niya did really

great, as well. For her not to always do it like I do. But I think she did her part.

SANIYA RIVERS: I think the fastest way to grow is just being thrown into the fire. I've been thrown into the fire since I was a freshman. I didn't think I was going to play point guard in college. I thought I was going to be on the wing. But my Coach Dawn told me my freshman year, if you want to play, you're going to play point guard. I was just like, okay, I'll play point guard.

Then this year obviously like she said with Mimi and River leaving, everybody was moving around. Nobody knew what position they would play. Obviously Zoe coming in at point guard this year, me playing more wing, and then seeing that at first we didn't know if we would have a true 5 to play, Tilda getting thrown into the fire.

She's never played the 5 before, definitely not at this level. So her being thrown into the fire, and like you said, sometimes I have to play the 4 but I'm long enough, I'm fast enough, quick enough, strong enough.

I think that we all just hold our own, and if we're thrown into the fire, we just know we all have to play our role and do whatever we can to contribute to the win.

WES MOORE: We don't really call them 4 players. We've got four guards. We're playing four guards out there, and she may end up having to guard a forward that's a little bit taller than her or whatever.

But it's a four-guard system, and we've got four pretty good ones. That's the way we try to approach it.

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