

Atlantic Coast Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 8, 2025

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

Duke Blue Devils

Coach Kara Lawson

Ashlon Jackson

Oluchi Okananwa

Postgame Press Conference



Duke 61, Notre Dame 56

KARA LAWSON: It was a hard-fought battle. It's what which expected. Notre Dame is a great team and a team that's really hard to prepare for and really hard to play because they have so many weapons, and they're very good on both ends of the floor.

I thought our team stayed really disciplined defensively. I thought we executed what we were trying to do, keep them out of transition as much as we could, and limit their opportunities on the glass. They beat us pretty big on the glass in the first meeting, and so we were able to kind of turn that into a double-digit plus for us.

Then just made big plays late. It's what you'd expect in a March game. It was close, a possession game in the fourth quarter, and we had some players make some huge plays to give us that final separation.

Q. Neighborhood battle for the ACC championship; does familiarity have a factor in this game tomorrow?

KARA LAWSON: Well, I think the way the new ACC schedule is set up, we play everybody once except for North Carolina we play twice. So really in this whole tournament, we've played everyone for the second time.

I think there is a familiarity, certainly, with our program and NC State's program. What a wonderful team they have, a team that made the Final Four a season ago and has a lot of experience.

I anticipate it to be a really competitive game, and we're excited to be in the final and play for an ACC

championship.

Q. You'll play your third game tomorrow, but the second one was especially intense. Do you consider physical and mental fatigue playing into this, or does it matter in March?

KARA LAWSON: I think what we try to do is make sure we place a priority on their recovery, try to get them back to the hotel and get food and get off their feet and get treatment and understand that tomorrow is going to be as intense as this was, if not more intense, because of what we're both playing for.

Yeah, I think you understand that as a coach, that three in three is hard. But they're being asked to do the same thing, the opponent. So it's even. I think we both have had two hard games here and are going to have to put together a third one to get it.

Q. What does this moment mean to you?

KARA LAWSON: This moment means that we have an opportunity to play for a championship, and in my home at Duke. This is the first time we've made it this far in the tournament, so I'm really proud of my team to advance, to have the opportunity to play for an ACC championship.

It means that we've won two games and we've got a chance to win a third tomorrow. So it's very exciting. But also we haven't really done anything yet but just get to the final. So both teams I know are really focused on winning the final. So that's what we've got to do.

Q. Can you describe the energy of your team?

KARA LAWSON: There's so many adjectives that flood into my mind, and they change daily. They are just, like, off the wall sometimes. They're very loud. They're very sweet and nice. Sometimes they're annoying. They just have it all. We have so many different characters. They all have great senses of humor.

I think what I love -- I love a lot of things about this team, but they all have a good sense of humor, like we can make



fun of another one, which I think is like a critical thing. Everyone can take a joke. They make fun of me a lot, too, and I think that's good when you have that in your relationship with your players and they have it with it each other is if somebody does something we're going to make fun of them the next day.

I had a good one this morning, right? We laugh, and nobody is above getting made fun of. I think that's important. Yeah, nobody.

Q. Can you talk me through the importance down the stretch of chewing clock and making sure Notre Dame didn't have that much time to work with, even as your shots may not have been necessarily falling down?

KARA LAWSON: Yeah, I think just obviously time and score is very important late in the game. If you have the lead and certainly you have more than a one-possession lead, there's opportunities to kind of shorten the game, so we did that there with a couple possessions.

We also got a big offensive rebound to be able to take even more time off the clock. So that was something that we -- I wouldn't say we talked about beforehand.

But in the second half the offense is in front of the coach, so I can just communicate that live, like in stream to them, what I want. That's what we did.

Q. You mentioned game planning for Notre Dame and how difficult that is because of all the options that they have. What was different about this one? Why did it work this time and maybe not in South Bend? Then for the players, what maybe felt different about defending them this time as opposed to in South Bend?

KARA LAWSON: I think the biggest difference from the first game to the second game was the transition and certainly the runs. That run at the start of the third quarter up there kind of created too much separation, and we had too much of a hill to climb against them.

I thought outside of that run when I went back and looked at the tape from the first game, we played them pretty even. We talked about managing when they get a couple buckets together not letting them go on an outsized run.

Now, that's easy to say and hard to do. But I thought the transition game, I thought we got them into the half court more times to go against our half-court defense in this game than we did in the first game. That's what it felt like. I could be wrong. I'll have to go back and chart possessions and see. But it felt like they were playing against our half-court defense more than in the first game.

ASHLON JACKSON: It's kind of like what Coach said, our transition game being -- at South Bend up there, they capitalized on a lot of our mistakes, and I would say this game, the level of us competing was a major factor within that.

They're a great team, and yeah, like we just knew that going into the game we were going to have to up that competition level and just continue to capitalize on what we needed to work on within their transition game.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Yeah, I agree definitely with what both Coach and Ash said and realize it was our connectivity and us locking in on personnel and our defensive scheme.

Q. Coach, we had an all-female ref crew today. Can you talk about how important female representation is on all levels of this game?

KARA LAWSON: I think female representation is very important. In our sport we continue to have a lot of great women in every area, whether that's coaching, whether that's obviously the young women here playing, administrators, officials, all of that, people at the league office or at the conference office.

I think that's important because my players and everybody's players but I'll speak to my players specifically, they see women at every level of our department. Our athletic director Nina King is a woman. So our players know there's no limits to the different places that they can reach within the sporting world and within the business world, not just because they're very high achieving and players that are very goal oriented but because they can see.

Our goal is to just continue to surround them with good role models and to get them thinking big in terms of what their futures can be because they can be just as bright if not brighter when they finish playing basketball.

Q. For the ladies, can you talk to me about how much Jadyn contributed, her level of physicality doesn't necessarily translate to the stat sheet but she was a momentum changer.

ASHLON JACKSON: Yes, I said once before, Jadyn is everything to us. Her ability -- her being able to play any position on the floor, and then on defense she's big for us. She helps us out a lot.

But yeah, she's great. Jadyn, I would credit her a lot because she brings it every day in practice.

Coach is on all of us really to reach that level of competition that she brings every single day. But yeah, she's really big time for us.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: I would say I know sometimes I get called the Energizer Bunny, but I was talking with her about this yesterday, I feed off of her a lot. Her energy and her intensity just fills me up, and honestly, I look to her whenever I feel like our team needs some intensity and we need to bring it up a little bit more.

Q. You had eight players score at least four points tonight. No one had more than 14. Walk me through the depth of this team and what it means moving forward in the season?

KARA LAWSON: I mean, all season we've had a rotation of 10 players. I'm very confident in all of them. We haven't played 10 players in every single game, but we have a great deal of confidence.

I need to mention deJesus. She was unbelievable. She came in in the first half and changed the game for us with her shot making ability, with her fearlessness on the drives and with her defensive presence and just her competitiveness, and we talk about that a lot with every player on our team: Be ready to make plays.

I'm confident in all of them to make plays at any moment against any team. When they get in the game, they know that.

I thought she was a big difference maker for us, to be able to make some plays and make some shots when we were struggling a little bit to score. She came in and was great.

We rely on our depth. It's something that's always, always been a big part of our team.

Q. As Coach mentioned, this team hasn't played for a championship of this level together before, but in that fourth quarter you were so poised and got every big rebound, your team found the shots, you just seemed so cool as Coach was telling everyone to settle down. Seemed like you already were so calm. Where does that calmness and confidence come from in this moment?

ASHLON JACKSON: I feel like it comes from our determination to continue to get better, not just get better but within this tournament, like there's a lot of great talent. We just want to compete at that level. Tomorrow is going to be a big game, and we've just been focusing on that.

But we knew going into the game that it was going to be a level that we had to lock in on, and I would say that was really it. We just had to focus on our determination to get to where we wanted to go.

Q. Coach, you mentioned managing runs with Notre Dame was a focal point for today. Because you have some familiarity with NC State, playing them twice, what are the keys to securing the victory tomorrow, and in your opinion what are the focal points?

KARA LAWSON: Well, I think there's many keys for us. They're obviously very explosive team offensively. They have some of the best guards in the country. So it's a real challenge to try and defend them because they have so many different players that can make plays. They have great athleticism.

Defensively they can make plays with their length. They have terrific size. They have a number of players at the 5 position, but all of their players at the 5 position have great size.

It's going to be a very tall task for us. We'll get back and watch the film and get ourselves prepared, but we're looking forward to the matchup. We have a lot of respect for NC State, and we had a tough loss over there, but it was a great game.

I hope both of us are able to put on a great game tomorrow for the ACC championship.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.