

# Atlantic Coast Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Sunday, March 9, 2025

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

**Duke Blue Devils**

**Coach Kara Lawson**

**Oluchi Okananwa**

**Ashlon Jackson**

Postgame Press Conference



Duke 76, NC State 62

**KARA LAWSON:** Just incredibly proud of our team and what they were able to accomplish, not just in this game but over the course of the tournament for us. We faced some of the best teams in the country three days in a row, when you look at the seasons that Louisville, Notre Dame and NC State have put together, and to be able to come out as a champion is just very, very satisfying for our team that has worked hard all year.

Had some ups, had some downs, but we were able to put it all together in a weekend, and that's what you want to be as a team in March that can put it all together, and we showed that.

**Q. Did you play for Pat Summitt?**

**KARA LAWSON:** I did.

**Q. Is there any influence on you from her that may have had a bearing on what happened today?**

**KARA LAWSON:** Foundationally how we run our program, I mean, most of that comes from Coach Summitt, what our standard and expectations are, so not just today, every day.

In the Duke program there's a Coach Summitt thread an influence, and she coached us hard. She loved us hard. That's the same approach that I take with my players.

So I think there's a lot of commonality there in terms of what I learned from her and then what I'm trying to pass down to my players, as well.

So yes, I thought of her this morning when I was getting ready to go to the game. I thought how excited she would be for the opportunity that we had, and I know she would be really proud of the defensive performance in the second half by our team.

**Q. Across your last six wins, you've outscored your opponent each time in the third quarter. How important was having a dominant third quarter coming out of halftime for you guys?**

**KARA LAWSON:** It was very important. It's something we emphasized with the group. We needed to come out and play our brand of basketball, and I thought Oluchi in particular, we made the decision to start her in the third quarter because I thought she had just impacted the game at a really high level on both ends for us in the first half and felt like we needed her impact at the start of that third quarter.

In doing that, that group just went on a run very quickly. Was able to cut into their lead. Just felt like we started to gain momentum, and we just felt really good, and we just kept gaining momentum and making plays, and making plays on offense, making plays on defense, and Oluchi and Ashlon were the two primary threats for us today on the offensive end, and they both did a great job of making big plays.

**Q. Oluchi, the emotion on your face when you got tournament MVP, can you describe what you were feeling and what that moment meant to you?**

**OLUCHI OKANANWA:** A lot of gratitude. You don't get to this position without the help of so many loved ones, starting with my teammates. I really do play for them, truly, and the coaches who I would not be where I am without them and without their mentorship in my life.

And obviously just loved ones from back home that keep on cheering you on so when you get to that moment, it's kind of like, this was all for you guys.

**Q. How does it feel knowing the work ethic and the**



**energy and the vision you have for this team has now happened? So Coach and players can answer.**

ASHLON JACKSON: You know, it means the most to us, but I would say, like, yes, we're going to take this, this incredible moment. We're so blessed to be here, but I would say we want more. We're going to continue to strive every single day to get more and continue to compete amongst each other.

Like 'Luch said earlier, just stay Duke and just focus on ourselves.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Really just in agreement with Ash about how this is great and it's amazing and it's just fuel for us to keep on doing better as we continue on in the postseason.

**Q. You were down 10 at one point; what was going through your mind at that moment, and what was going through your mind as the comeback took form, and next thing you know you guys were running away it?**

ASHLON JACKSON: I would say we knew it wasn't going to be easy. We knew it wasn't just going to come to us, so we just had to chip away little by little and just bring the energy on both sides of the ball.

NC State is a very great team, and we knew they were going to go on runs and they were going to be there. All we had to do was focus on us and be us.

I'd say, yeah, that was pretty much it. Then having us come back, we knew that they could easily still come back into the game, as well, so we just had to continue to chip away.

**Q. Coach and for the players, as well, your team has been in the top 20 and it's had some good moments. But now you've beat five tournament teams in a row, ACC champions. What clicked? Why now? What is different about this moment?**

KARA LAWSON: I think we've just grown over the course of the last two years. I don't think that we woke up this morning and anything was different. We started this process probably last year. We had eight of 11 freshmen and sophomores of our team, and we weren't ranked and we weren't expected to do well.

That was okay. We just worked in the fall and we worked in the winter and we tried to grow and get better, and then come tournament time last year, we were able to make it to the second weekend and get to the Sweet 16, and I think

we gained a lot of confidence from that.

Then in the off-season, we talked about how we could grow and how we could improve and what areas we wanted each individual player to work on to do that, and they did that. They went and they worked on those things. This year same thing, we played the second toughest schedule in the country. We took them all over the United States to play in tough arenas against the best teams for this, for moments like this, to be a winner in March.

You have to be tested and exposed during the regular season to know individually what you're about and know what your team is about I believe that. That comes from Coach Summitt, as well. I believe you have to play tough people and put yourself in tough environments and not just try to get a good record. You've got to play real teams, and you've got to get exposed.

I think it's just been a continuous build for us, and it all came together this weekend.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Honestly, I think it's just hours and hours of hard work and being in the grind with one another, and like Coach said, really this process did start last year, coming in baby faced with 8 out of 11 being underclassmen, and it's just from then on, just growing our connectivity and being able to finally see it shine through now, it's amazing.

ASHLON JACKSON: I agree with both of them.

**Q. Coach Lawson, speaking of next steps, what are y'all taking to prepare for the Sweet 16 and those next steps?**

KARA LAWSON: Well, we're not preparing for anything like the Sweet 16 right now. We're going to prepare for a first-round game because the one thing that I know is true about March is you have to focus on the game in front of you always.

We don't know that opponent yet. Obviously that'll happen next weekend. So we'll take some time away this week so that we can recharge physically, mentally, emotionally, and then we'll get back in the gym to stay sharp on our own things, and once we get the opponent in front of us, we'll be fixated on that and trying to focus and not look ahead and focus on the task at hand.

Our group has done a good job of being singularly focused, not looking ahead. You have to be that in March. You have to be locked in because anybody can beat you. We could win our first-round game; we could lose our first-round game if we don't come out prepared. So we'll

have to keep our sharpness and our competitive edge.

I don't think with this group that winning an ACC Tournament championship has dulled their competitive edge. I think it's made it sharper. So we'll have to keep that sharp over the next two weeks.

**Q. The selection committee has a really messy task ahead of them this year, lots of losses, different variables. How important is seeding for y'all?**

KARA LAWSON: It's not important. We'll play wherever they want us to play and whoever they want us to play.

**Q. You guys combined for 16 rebounds. Can you just talk about the effort and the energy that you guys give on rebounding and also just the energy that the team gives on rebounding, too?**

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Ashlon had rebounds? (Laughing).

ASHLON JACKSON: Did I have six?

OLUCHI OKANANWA: That's a mistake.

ASHLON JACKSON: This is why this is funny. So all year, all last year, our coaches, especially Coach Kara, have really challenged me to continue to grow my game, and that was the biggest area, rebounding and defense.

They believed that I could do it, I believed I could do it, it's just be doing it for myself.

I mean, they also do say that rebounds win games, and I knew that going into it that -- like we talked about that. That for our team to have a chance, we have to continue to buckle down, try to get second chances, and we have to defensive rebound, as well.

But yeah, that's all I have. It was a great thing.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: I do have to say I'm so proud of her for her rebound. She got a big one, and I was like, good job, that was a big one. I mean, I love rebounding.

That's something that my teammates expect of me, my coaches expect of me, so I'm always going to bring that.

**Q. Building off of the laughter right now, yesterday in press Coach talked about there's a lightheartedness on the team, and I would say that's not necessarily -- we don't get to see that from the outside a lot, and Coach is really tough on the sidelines. What is it like to have that -- what is Coach Lawson like behind the**

**scenes? And how does a sense of humor play into it?**

ASHLON JACKSON: I would say that she used multiple adjectives yesterday to describe it. One was annoying, and we picked up on that, and we were like, you know what, we may be annoying to her, but I bet we make her day every single day.

If we weren't annoying, she wouldn't be her. She wouldn't continue to -- like she said, make jokes with us or just be there with us.

She always likes to tell us, any time we're away or on an away trip, she loves it the most, strictly because it's just us. Like I said, she loves us. Even though we're annoying, she loves us.

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Yeah. Facts.

**Q. Oluchi, you weren't here, but Ashlon, as Coach said, you guys will go anywhere and play anyone. Two years ago you got beat on your home floor in the second round. Is there any extra motivation with that?**

ASHLON JACKSON: Yeah, it's extra motivation with every single game. Like she said, first round, second round, we have to focus on the round that we're going into, and whether that's home, away or wherever, we just have to continue to focus on Duke and continue to, like I said, be us and have that energy.

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