

# Atlantic Coast Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 6, 2026

Duluth, Georgia, USA

Gas South Arena

## North Carolina Tar Heels Courtney Banghart

## Elina Aarnisalo

## Nyla Harris

### Postgame Press Conference

North Carolina 85, Virginia Tech 68

**COURTNEY BANGHART:** Certainly this is the best time of the year. Obviously want to thank the tournament as a whole. It's a lot to put on this many good teams, and it's such an exciting time of year.

Thanks for what you guys are doing in that way.

You really should hear from these two. We knew this was a tough game. We knew this was a team we had to beat in overtime to even be in this position. And we keep talking about the most dangerous teams keep getting better and obviously based on the results, we keep getting better. Really physical battle.

Hats off to Duffy. She's got her group playing really hard. They're hard to guard, put a lot of pressure on the rim and in the paint. We had to keep finding a way, which we did.

I'm really proud of you two for what you've done as well as your teammates, and so far that's win.

**Q. Nyla, I know you just won, but what does it mean to you to be able to face your former team, Louisville, to have a chance to go to the conference championship?**

**NYLA HARRIS:** Yeah, I know when I went to the portal, I had the opportunity to go to a whole different conference. So many different conferences, but I wanted to come back. Not because being petty, it was more because Coach Walz has such a great program, and I know playing against them I'll get better. And I wanted to be able to face throughout the course of my season. I'm excited to play



them tomorrow. I think my teammates are, as well, and we're ready to get back.

There's nothing much to say except being ready for tomorrow and they're a great team and so are we, so yeah.

**Q. For the players, Virginia Tech got within 10, 12 points a few times in the second half. What did you say in your huddles to come together and make sure they didn't get any closer?**

**ELINA AARNISALO:** I think for us it was mostly about being tough, but noticing the foul calls and being aware of that. We struggled with that a little bit today. But just staying together, knowing what we need to do, box out, rebound. That was all the emphasis in every huddle.

**NYLA HARRIS:** What she said, just being together. In this part of March, it's going to be ugly, it's going to be pretty, but it's about staying together, playing tough. And I think that's the way we overcame that was just playing through it and trusting each other and just holding each other accountable when we didn't make the right plays or we were being lazy on defense.

**Q. Courtney, down 16-11 after the first quarter. What adjustments did you make to get your offense revved up the rest of the game?**

**COURTNEY BANGHART:** Yeah, we said before the game -- I know there's been some talk about it -- do you want the double bye because you come out of the gate a little bit, you haven't played since Sunday, they've been in the gym. So I sort of planted that seed, that there's a possibility that we've got to find our legs.

Once we did that, I liked a lot of the takes. I showed some of them at halftime. We just didn't make them. I thought I was more concerned about the fact that we gave up 16 points and I thought they were ones we could have gotten back.

I thought they made some key plays, but for the most part, that slow start, I'm just going to say I think it was -- these



guys get really excited. They're finally here in March. Just came up a little bit -- we were a little bit off rhythm, but stuck to the game plan and we were all right.

**Q. For Nyla and Elina, Courtney talked about that defense a little bit. In the second quarter you held Virginia Tech to only three made field goals and only two three-pointers all game. What did those defensive adjustments look like and how was that feel happening there?**

NYLA HARRIS: Just the biggest thing for us like I said before, was just playing hard, sticking to our defensive plan, our game plan and trusting it. They're going to score some tough ones, we're going to not score some tough ones, and I think the biggest thing for us was sticking to the game plan, being aggressive on screens, and it was going to fall.

Yeah, that's really all I have to say.

ELINA AARNISALO: I agree with everything that you said, like sticking to the game plan and just trusting it. And that worked in our favor today.

**Q. Coach, first time you played Virginia Tech it was a three-point overtime victory. What did you do this time around to get the more decisive victory?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, it's a really good team. We've had a lot of history with this program. We didn't think we played great the first time out. We've said kind of all along that the best teams keep getting better. So we kind of were able to look back at that game and show areas where we knew we could get better and be better this time around.

There's an assuredness of our upperclassmen that they bring. Still, I think we're like the seventh youngest team in the country or whatever it is. But that's a big asterisk next to having Nyla Harris and Indya Nivar on your team.

We thought we could be better on the defensive end taking away some different things. We lost Carys a little bit too much in the first game. We really handled Carleigh fine, but we allowed their other speedy guards to get into the paint, so we really prioritized playing better on that side.

But offensively we also wanted to pick on whether or not they were going to hug Lanie and I think there were times when they hugged Lanie and we were able to play out of that. And other times they were in a switch and we played out of that. These guys just have really figured out how you're going to guard us, we're going to be able in live time to handle that, and that's been fun to coach.

**Q. You talked about other teams and you guys are one of those that are peaking now and you're doing a lot better. What do you attribute to all that growth in addition to preparing for this game?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, resiliency, connectedness. Each team finds their identity at a certain time. We won 13 of our last 14 games against really good teams on the road. I think three of the last five were Quad 1 wins. We're just better than we were in December. We're more assured.

Elina is more aggressive. Our freshmen are better. We've been through more stuff. We only have two upperclassmen typically in a uniform or three. We just had to get through some stuff and figure out who we were going to be and how we were going to get through with resilience and connectedness.

We're just a way better team than we were in December and that's why you just keep getting better. Yeah, I would say that.

**Q. Courtney, Elina and Lanie combined for 39. What did you see out of the guards, and how effective when they hit big shots and getting downhill?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, Lanie had a quick trigger today and they gave her space to begin with. She hasn't had much space, so she was excited about that and trigger happy and trigger ready, made some big shots.

When you have good shooters in, it spaces the floor for E. And then you have these bigs that can separate out of screens more, which we weren't doing early in December. When we got E, I told I'm going to put the ball in your hands and I need you to be aggressive and make plays.

She's like Nyla. They're nicest kids so they first want to fit in and all of that. Now we've great shooters. So if you're going to guard the arc, we're going to come at you in the middle of the floor or we're going to get E to go to work. If you're going to double the post, we're going to hurt you from the arc. And these guys have done a good job at reading that in live time.

**Q. Courtney, you mentioned prioritizing Tech's guards outside of Wenzel. Wenzel had 26 but nobody else had double figures. What did you like about the way your players locked into that part of the scout?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, every time-out, they're just staring right at you. They realized we all have a piece and a role on this team, and my role is to make sure I can

in live time help them see what's going on and what's not going on. Wenzel got a lot those at the free-throw line, 14 at the free-throw line. She got two on baseline and out of bounds when we didn't get into bodies and gave her easy pull-ups. So that's four plus 14 is 18, so 18 of her 26 over a 37-minute. I thought we did a good job on her, too.

Their guards are really speedy, so you have to play underneath them as quick as you can. We were able to use our depth and get underneath them better, which was good. We have biggs that can move, which helps. But yeah, they're hard to guard. Their guards are hard to guard. We had to stay underneath them as best we could. We did the best we could.

**Q. Courtney, what were you seeing from your team in that second quarter especially from a defensive standpoint but also 29 points in that quarter going from 11 to 29?**

COURTNEY BANGHART: Yeah, it's a good question. Because we finally got stops in the second quarter, which allowed us to get out and go. And then you have to decide are you going to run to the arc? Because we have guys that are going to run to the arc. Are you going to run to the paint or play 1-v-1 in the post? Or are you going to try to match up and sag, in which case E is going to get you on your heels.

When we were able to get stops, we felt confident that these guys find their rhythm. When we look back at the first, the things I'm not going to like are the passing turnovers. I'm not going to like the times that we threw it off on one foot. But I liked a lot of looks in the first quarter. We just weren't making them and then we weren't getting stops.

Then they were looking to me to help call through the game, and I was tried implore you are the game plan, that is the game plan. And they took that to heart.

**Q. Nyla, you already answered this, but you beat Virginia Tech already but you lost the game to Louisville you guys probably want back. Elina, you and Reyna went 1 for 15. What are some things you're going to take from that film tomorrow to get your look back a little bit tomorrow obviously in a game you guys didn't play very well, I think is how Coach put it.**

ELINA AARNISALO: Well, I didn't even remember about that stat. But I think also, it's been a while since we played that game, since I didn't remember that really --

NYLA HARRIS: It was the first game of the season.

ELINA AARNISALO: We're going to come out tomorrow -- it's a new game, a new opportunity. We're going to be aggressive. It doesn't really matter what happened in the last game. It's a new opportunity, and we've got so much better since our game. We've got so much closer, the players and the coaches together and just improved every single game. I think that gives us a great starting point, great point to go to the game tomorrow.

COURTNEY BANGHART: I thought you were going to ask us about hosting because we keep winning, 13 of 14. And again, this is a really good team. I think we've done a lot of good work, and I'm super proud of you guys to put yourselves in that position. Even when we were at UCLA to start the season or at South Carolina, it was like guys, I'm not worrying about what's happening right now. I'm worried about can we continue to stack minutes. And finally it's a team over the last month and a half, we've really stacked minutes.

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