

Virginia Head Coach Tony Bennett

TONY BENNETT: We wanted a chance to play in this tournament. We got the chance. First, credit to Ohio for how they played. Well-coached. They played tough. They made some big plays down the stretch.

But our guys were, again, hopeful that we'd get this opportunity. The NCAA allowed us to come in, in a unique way. But thankful for it. It just stings right now to not advance in this tournament. It's such a special tournament.

Again, you know how that goes. It's the last game of the year that's always tough. I know our guys are feeling it right now. We had some chances. I'm sure I'll get asked that question. Don't know if we got tired down the stretch or felt a little bit of the pressure, but thought we got some good looks. Just had a pretty poor shooting day, very poor shooting day from three with some quality shots. But again, they did a solid job defensively.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. You were up seven with 14 minutes to go. The game kind of swung from that point. What was the difference in the final stretch?

TONY BENNETT: Yeah, I think we had some good stretches of defense in there. We were deflecting balls, making it hard on them. I thought, boy, early in the game we were settling a little bit. We were shooting a little quick. Then I thought in the second half we ran pretty good offense and got the kind of looks, the rhythm open looks, or in the lane the shots we wanted. We really had trouble capitalizing on them. I take, again, the quality of the looks.

I think going cold in that setting hurt. When we did need a key stop, they got a nice backdoor and a slip. That hurt us.

But the guys played as hard as they could and they fought. But I think that ability – comes down to banging a big shot here or there or getting a rhythm. As far as from a shooting standpoint, looked like we didn't knock down the shots we usually make.

Again, they did a good job guarding us. They were quality looks from my standpoint.

Q. After all your team had been through in the last week with the COVID protocols, quarantine, what do you tell the team in the locker room after the loss, just everything you've been through the last 10 days or so?

TONY BENNETT: Yeah, kind of how I started out with my statement. I said we wanted an opportunity. We were grateful to the NCAA for giving us that. We met all the protocols. I know more about protocols than I care to, to be honest. We weren't sure after our Syracuse game if we were going to get a chance to play in the tournament. We were allowed that opportunity.

We came in, you know, we thought we had a chance. We certainly did. I don't know if it would have mattered if it was a normal prep or not. How can you say? We played a good team, and that's this tournament.

I think the old guys that put as much as they could into this program, I said, You'll remember your ACC regular-season championship. That's a big deal. You'll also remember getting beat in this tournament. But nothing to hang your head about. You come to these games, that's what makes this the survive-and-advance mentality, loser go home. That's the reality of this.

I faced such joy in this tournament on so many occasions. I've faced the heartache, too. Again, as I say, you always have to be willing to accept them both, know that when your career is done this doesn't define you, whether you win it all or you lose or anything. It's what you do, you do it with love, joy and passion, then you don't let it define you beyond what it should.

Q. Defensively in the first half you guys seemed really locked in. Did you feel like more than ever you were probably going to have to ride that defense because of the offensive rust? Talk about Vander Plas, what he was able to do in the second half.

TONY BENNETT: No, I thought we were sharp defensively, for the limited prep and all that stuff. Again, I said it, it's what we tried to do all year. I'm glad it was there. I thought we fought. Even good stretches in the second half, real good stretches defensively. It will come down to that.

You're going to have to make some plays offensively. I sensed the looks were there. You could just see we couldn't get them to drop. It did put a lot of pressure on our defense. That's what stung, a couple of those breakdowns at key times defensively, otherwise a pretty solid defensive effort. Again, credit to them.

Ben Vander Plas, he did what his old man would do when I played with him: make key plays. He's really good. Hit some big threes end of the half. That was a big three, then the two threes he hit and a couple drives. He's just skilled and sound and he knows how to play the game.

Again, happy for him. Hurting for our guys.

Q. You talked about looking at those seniors after y'all found out about the COVID case. What was it like looking at them tonight after what they put in this year?

TONY BENNETT: Like any, you thank them. You know there will be probably better times to speak clearer to them about what they meant and who they are as men and as players. After the game, not a lot is heard. It's just trying to encourage them and thank them and tell them that they'll always be a part of this.

Again, they'll have an ACC regular-season championship, and they got a chance to play in the tournament. That will sting how it ended, but that was the extent of it. I said I wish I had some magic words to make the sting go away, but I don't. Time heals all things.

Q. Now that it's all wrapped up, how do you overall reflect on this past year? What will you take into next season?

TONY BENNETT: Hard to kind of evaluate the whole year.

It was a windy road, unique. The way it started, obviously this last, whatever, nine or eight days, is strange and as unique as you'd find heading into this.

Again, at the start of the season we didn't even know if we would get to play that many games, what would happen with the NCAA tournament. I'm glad we're having the NCAA tournament, but it was a strange year unlike any, and I hope it never happens again. There's such an experience when the fans are there, the excitement of it. That won't take anything away from the teams of course that are advancing.

One for the ages for sure. I'm sure I'll reflect and have some better insights on it. It was a lot. You come in, most teams came in I think June and July, none of the guys got to go home. I think it was just hanging in there and enduring and growing, enjoying times together, kind of suffering through the rough stuff.

Q. You just mentioned what a strange season it has been. Were you made aware before your game of VCU's situation? Was that a stark reminder of how tenuous this all was?

TONY BENNETT: Oh, no, man. I didn't know. VCU couldn't play their game against Oregon?

Q. Correct.

TONY BENNETT: What is it with us Virginia schools? Oh, man, I'm sorry to hear that for those young men. I didn't know that.

I guess you're right, that is...

Q. Can you just explain what you weren't able to do this week as far as preparation? I guess the context for not being able to do those things at this time of year.

TONY BENNETT: Look, that's done. We had a chance and we wanted that, we got to do some individual stuff. We had a normal team practice on Friday morning before we left.

We prepared to the best of our abilities. Again, Ohio played a better game when they needed to make plays, they made the plays, and we left some on the table. So, again, I'm grateful we got the chance. You can't go back and change anything. I thought our guys were as ready as they can, given the circumstances.

You know, it would have been a heck of a win, and a hard loss.

Q. For example, film, is it something where everybody has –

TONY BENNETT: We watched a lot of film on Zoom, prepared well that way.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much.

Virginia Forward Sam Hauser

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by Sam Hauser. We'll take questions.

Q. What was it that kind of faded in the second half for you guys defensively? What let Vander Plas kind of get going there?

SAM HAUSER: Yeah, they had a lot of good action on offense. It was tough to guard. He broke loose a couple times, hit a couple big ones to get his momentum going in the right direction. He made a lot of big plays at the right time. So hats off to him. Hats off to Ohio.

Q. I don't know if any of you seniors will come back, but from what you know about this team, how do you expect they will respond to this?

SAM HAUSER: They're going to respond, for sure. Taking a loss like this is tough. Ending your year like this is tough. I know the guys who will come back are going to take this personally. I think they're going to get even better from it. I'm not too worried about that for our guys coming back next year.

Q. This season has had a little bit of everything. It's been a real roller coaster ride. How do you think you'll look back on this year?

SAM HAUSER: Definitely going to remember it. Everything was different. It wasn't a normal college basketball year. But overall I was just happy to be able to play and be able to play a pretty good number of our games.

Obviously, this last week has been hectic, but we were just happy we were able to have a chance to play in the tournament. That's where you want to be able to end your season, is this tournament. Overall a good year. ACC champs. Can't take that away from us, for sure. Definitely happy I chose to come here.

Q. Defensively you seemed really locked in in the first half. How focused were you on maybe there would be some offensive rust, but defense was going to carry you through tonight?

SAM HAUSER: Yeah, I think we've been trying to make that our mentality. Defense travels no matter what, even if your offense isn't there. I thought we played a pretty solid defensive game up until the last couple minutes where we had a couple big breakdowns. They got a couple of layups at the rim. Other than that, I thought we played hard on defense. They made some tough shots. They made crucial plays at the right time.

Q. What have the emotions been like this past week, going back to the positive case, just kind of fighting and being resilient?

SAM HAUSER: Yeah, with this year, there's a lot of uncertainty. You never know when a thing like that can happen. It happened at the last possible day it could have happened in order for us to play. We're thankful it didn't happen a day later.

It's just one of those things. It's unpredictable. You just kind of had to roll with it, do what you can when you're not around your team as much. It was an interesting week, for sure. We were able to watch a lot of film, have one practice at least. So we felt like we were confident coming into this game.

Q. What will you take away from this season as a team? Even though it was one-and-done, what...

SAM HAUSER: I think it showed a lot of discipline out of our guys and a lot of resiliency throughout the whole year. We had a couple times where we had a little COVID pause, we missed a couple games. Our opponents have had COVID pauses which caused us not to be able to play them. Everything was so uncertain. You never know what the next day was going to bring.

That's hard to deal with for however – I think we've been on campus since July. Just dealing with that, just being able to be around each other, getting to know each other better was huge for us. We definitely got to know each other to a deeper level that I don't think we would have in normal circumstances. I think that's definitely a positive.

The basketball piece, I think overall everyone was just happy to be able to play and have a season because last year got cut short.

Q. You mentioned what a strange year it's been, only having had one practice. You are the ACC's number two three-point shooting team. So many shots fell short tonight. I know you don't want to make excuses, but were there some tired legs out there tonight?

SAM HAUSER: It's just one of those things where the shots just weren't falling. I don't think it was tired legs at all. I think it's one of those games that it happens. It happens to everyone. That's why your defense has to be real good. I thought our defense was pretty good up until they made that run in the second half.

But you can't make any excuse for not being able to make shots. You have to find other ways to score. Tonight we just left some baskets out there that we should have made.

Q. Vander Plas, what makes him such a tough guy to cover? Scored in the second half even when you had good defense on him.

SAM HAUSER: He's a great player, man. He's crafty, deceiving, got a really good shot fake. Obviously you saw he has really deep range, made a couple bombs tonight. Hats off to him. Man, he's good. He's so sound, so fundamentally sound. He's a good player. He is kind of like a glue guy to that team. Without him, I don't know what they'd be like.

Happy he played well. He's a Wisconsin guy. I know him. Happy for him and happy for the team.

Q. Jay Huff getting into foul trouble, how did that impact you?

SAM HAUSER: I mean, yeah, no, that happens. That's the next-man-up mentality. I thought we had good minutes from the guys off the bench to fill in when he was off the floor. I thought guys came in, brought energy, played good defense and rebounds. When Jay was in there, he was good.

Just one of those things. That's why you always have guys off the bench that are ready to go. I think overall they were good tonight.

THE MODERATOR: We wish you the best of luck in your career. Thank you very much.

SAM HAUSER: Thank you. Again, hats off to Ohio. Best of luck to them. Also giving a shout-out from our team to the Virginia women's swimming and diving team who just won a national championship. Congrats to them. Thank you.