

University of Virginia Women's Basketball Media Conference

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Coach Amaka Agugua-Hamilton A.D. Carla Williams Press Conference



CARLA WILLIAMS: Thank you, everyone, for joining us. And thank you for being here, Coach Ryan. We appreciate your support.

(Applause).

Also want to pause for a moment. Also want to acknowledge our players who are here. Many of them have classes but several are here.

I haven't been able to wipe their smiles off their faces since they met with Coach Mox the other night. Thank you to the players for being here.

UVA women's basketball has an elite and storied history built by Coach Ryan and countless players, assistant coaches, team managers, athletic trainers, and many others. Anything great begins with the right people.

An elite program requires selflessness by all involved, a team-first approach, a commitment to integrity, a relentless work ethic, a determined pursuit of excellence on and off the court, talented and coachable players a dedicated staff, and lastly a leader that can bring these people and these ideals together. A leader who can inspire others to believe. And Coach Mox is that person for us here at the University of Virginia.

In addition to being an exceptional coach, she is also a very special person. And we are indeed very fortunate to have her as our coach and as our newest member to the UVA family. So please join me in welcoming Coach Mox as UVA women's basketball coach.

(Applause)

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Thank you and good

morning. I'm excited and overjoyed to become the University of Virginia's women's basketball head coach. It's a blessing to be leading a program with such rich women's basketball history, academic excellence and global name recognition.

From our leaders to our coaches, student-athletes, to our facilities and resources, the UVA brand is truly first-class.

I want to first and foremost thank my Lord and savior because without him I would not be here. I also want to thank my family for their endless sacrifices, love and support. I have my husband, Billy Hamilton here, and my son Isaiah (phonetic) Hamilton. I want to thank the board of visitors, President Ryan and Carla Williams for believing in me and my vision and providing this amazing opportunity.

I also would like to thank the past and present UVA greats for reaching out to me and showering me with love and support -- Debbie Ryan, Dawn Staley, Tammy Reese and Wendy Palmer, just to name a few. I thank you all for welcoming me and my family into the Wahoo family.

Now to my players, I look forward to the journey ahead. I look forward to building relationships, winning on the court, winning in the classroom and winning in the community.

There will be some ups and downs, some good times and bad, but we'll get through them together. There's a lot of work to be done here. But there's a lot of blessings ahead. There are banners to be hung. This community is hungry for more and so am I.

A little more about me. My overall coaching philosophy fits into three letters, F-A-B, fab -- family, academics, basketball.

Family. We'll have to work at this. It's not going to be something we say; it's going to be who we are. You'll be accountable to the person on your right and your left and will understand that you are part of something that's bigger than yourself.

I take the relationship-building piece very seriously. I



invest in people. I'm tough when I need to be but I love always.

Academics. You have to be able to take care of your business in the classroom, just as much as you take care of your business on the court.

My job is not only to make you a better basketball player and to win games but it's also to prepare you for life after basketball. I take a lot of pride in that.

Everyone will be pushed to do their best, which will ultimately be different for each kid. We will celebrate your success off the court just as much as we celebrate your success on the court.

Now, basketball. Basketball's last in that order, but it's certainly not least. It's a big reason why we're here. The tradition here for many, many years was to pursue championships and to put up banners in the stands.

We will get back to that. Player development will be key. Recruiting will be essential. We need to rejuvenate this community. Bringing back alums, getting butts in those seats, all that will help the process.

One thing you'll hear me say all the time is progress is the process. We just have to keep taking steps forward. We'll be disciplined, hardworking, relentless competitors day in, day out. But we will enjoy the journey.

We are about to start an amazing ride together, and I can't wait. Wahoo Nation, I promise to give you my all and that's all I ask in return. Go 'hoos.

(Applause)

Q. This has been a rough stretch for the program. As you begin the rebuilding process, what are your immediate priorities?

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: First and foremost, getting to know the players that are here, building relationships and getting to work on the court. I take a lot of pride in player development. So that's the first thing we need to do.

Second, recruiting. We already hilt the ground running with that. I think -- obviously I like to recruit the four-year kid, but the transfer portal has also changed some things. Looking at some good transfers that are going to fit our culture, but also can be competitive on the floor.

I'll be bringing my staff. So that will be an easy transition for me, and I'll be able to delegate and get organized pretty quickly. So that will help. But we've got to develop these

kids and we've got to recruit. Those are the two things that need to happen here in the next couple of months.

Q. You talked about rebuilding kind of the community's stake in this. How do you do that you took a program that was in pretty good shape. This program has struggled, but you grew up in Virginia when this was one of the top programs in the country. What are the biggest challenges with getting it back to that level?

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: From when I was in high school, I mean, this was a staple. There was championships here. UVA was a big program and still is. So I want to tap into the community. I'm somebody who loves to go out and talk. I want people to get to know me, get to know my vision, get to know our players. It's not just going to be me. Our players will be in the community as well.

Our alums are a big part of this. I want to make sure they know they're welcome and they're a big part of this. You have to know where this program has been in order to understand where it's going. So I think those are two big pieces.

But we need the community support. I think that they'll enjoy the energy that we're going to bring here. And feel more involved, I think, because we're going to be out there. We're going to be speaking. We're going to be giving back. I'll have some open practices. Anything I can to just create more energy around the program.

Q. Carla, your process in finding Coach Mox, you're in a unique position with your connections in women's basketball obviously, having played and coached. Who did you kind of rely on, talk to, what was the process? And is Coach somebody you had an eye on for maybe a little while?

CARLA WILLIAMS: Yes. She's been on our radar for a while and had a great career at Missouri State. So when they made it to the Sweet 16, that got a lot of people's attention because that's a big deal. It's a great program. But you still have to work at it. You've got to recruit. You've got to develop players in order to win.

And she was able to do that at a very high level in her time at Missouri State. So our staff worked really hard to vet candidates and we had some great candidates. Our approach was to -- we talked with the players, talked with the team and got their input. Spoke with some former players and Coach Ryan as well, to get their input. Because we think the history of the program is really, really important. And I think that will be a huge asset for Coach

Mox and for the team moving forward.

So we got a lot of input as we were vetting candidates. And along the way, it just became crystal clear that Amaka was the best candidate for UVA.

Q. What is your fondest memory, when you look at this women's program, obviously when you were going to high school, what was your fondest memory of this program when you were here or when you were in the state?

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Well, I mean, some of those Final Four runs, I guess you could say. But for me Dawn Staley, she was kind of bigger than life when I was growing up -- Wendy Palmer, Tammy Reese. Those names, I just remember just the passion they played with. The pride that they walked around and spoke about UVA with. It's just a very strong brand. And being from this state I understand that. I understand what having Virginia on your chest means and the pride that goes with that.

And it's not just what you do on the court, it's how you carry yourself. It's the character of our program. It's how we impact our community. So there's a lot that goes into that. And that's why I said it's a first-class place. And I just want to uphold that.

Q. You grew up in the state of Virginia, but what about this job -- it's been a program that's been down for a couple of years -- but what about this job kind of spoke to the potential that this program has?

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Yeah, I've always loved UVA. Obviously great facilities, great resources, great location, great academics. The list goes on. So it was definitely on my radar but actually after talking to Carla and just connecting with her, I'm a people person. And the people that I work with and work for is very important to me.

I had a great relationship in my prior job with the athletic director there. So it was really important to understand Carla's vision, what she's looking for, how she leads. And I just really fell in love with the way she's running this athletic department. So that was a no-brainer for me.

Q. You made the transition from associate head coach to head coach look easy in your first year. I'm sure it was more challenging than it appeared. What have the past three seasons maybe taught you as a coach in your development as a coach?

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: That you can lead with your heart. You can value people. You can impact lives,

impact communities. When people look at my journey at Missouri State, they just think that I walked into something and it happened. There's a lot of hard work that went into that. And the culture I built there and how I developed those student-athletes, me and my staff, is just it's not an easy thing to do.

So, if you dive in and really look at what we accomplished, you know that it can be accomplished here as well. When I got there, there was no players on any all-conference teams at all. There was nobody being recognized individually. And by the time I left, we had five players on first-team, three on the all-defensive team, two defensive players of the year, one player of the year. The accolades go on -- most improved, newcomers.

We had all kinds of accolades because we invested in them. We worked on their confidence. We worked on their game. We helped them off the court. And so I know, and I'm very confident, that I can develop players and my staff can develop players. I'm confident that I can put them in positions to be successful. So that's what we did there.

And we broke a lot of records. Made histories. Etched our names in those history books. And that's what I want to do here. I want to inspire these kids, even the ones we're looking to bring in, and help them walk with that confidence on and off the court, and get them to believe in something bigger than themselves.

Q. Understanding that personnel I know will dictate a lot of it, but what is your preferred kind of style of play? Might it change with the caliber of players you might be able to attract at UVA?

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: My style of play won't change. It's up-tempo we'll play fast make or miss. We have organized transition break but we like to get up and down. I have a continuity offense that we flow into but also run a lot of quick hits. I like versatile players, post players that can shoot, guards, big guards that can post. I like to play with the defense a little bit that way and utilize our mismatches when we can. Offensively, that's how we play.

Defensively, if you look at our track record, when I was at Missouri State, we were top 10 in scoring defense in the country. Rebounding, we were up there, our stats in the country, because that's a staple. That's who we're going to be. We have to defend at a high level, be physical, understand angles. I'm more of a gap defense coach than deny.

So that's primarily what we do. But then rebounding is big. Rebounding is big. That was one of my strengths as a player and it carries on as a coach. If you want to play for

me you've got to be able to rebound the ball. So that's something that we're going to do as well.

Q. This program, on the men's side, gets a lot of critics that talk about the style of play and defense and slow offense and all that stuff. But there's a banner up there that they won a couple years ago playing that way. And the fans here have really come to embrace 30-second shot clock violations and stuff like that. How much can that be an aspect of bringing the crowd back into the fold?

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: It's huge. I think any fan base loves when their players compete at a high level on both sides of the ball. So, yes, I'm going to stress defense a lot and rebounding, but you've got to stress both. I think it's big.

I have a lot of respect for Coach Bennett and what he's done here. And he doesn't even know this, but actually the continuity offense that we run is more a blocker, and we studied that a lot from him and his father. And that's not the only thing we do; we run a lot of quick hits, but we do default into that.

So I'm excited to pick his brain on that a little bit. I respect his style of play and what he does. But I have my own thing and my philosophy. And I think the community's going to enjoy it.

Q. Obviously you mentioned Coach Bennett and some of the other national championship coaches that are here at the University of Virginia. Have you had a chance to talk to any of them? If you have, what is the biggest piece of advice you've gotten from them to have success here?

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Well, it's been kind of a whirlwind, and I'm going to definitely tap in with everyone once we get settled. But I've gotten a lot of advice. A lot of people just tell me how much this community is craving just more energy, competitive basketball, exciting basketball, someone that's going to tap in with the community and care.

And so that's who I am. Nobody has to tell me to do that. I'm a people person. I invest in people, and it's not just my student-athletes. It's not just my coaching staff; it's everybody.

I asked Carla in the interview process, what is the camaraderie like between head coaches and the staff here. And I've already felt it. I'm still trying to get back to messages. But I think probably every head coach in this department has reached out, along with other athletic

administrative staff. So I love the family atmosphere here within athletics, and also within the community. I think the community has embraced me. And I couldn't ask for more.

Q. You've gone through this coaching search before with women's basketball. What did you kind of pick up through that first process and how did you change things, or just how do you compare those processes?

CARLA WILLIAMS: I think this time we were more targeted. And it was great to get really good feedback from former players, from Coach Ryan. We did that last time as well, from our current student-athletes. I know Virginia better now. So I have a better understanding of the university, of the institution, of the culture.

And so everything that Coach Mox is, is what we have. And so I love our head coaches, I think it's a great group. She and I talked about our head coaches a lot, how they share with each other, how they support each other.

And so making sure that we found the right fit, which she is a people person who is also a gym rat, so it's a perfect combination. And so I think just being more deliberate and more targeted and coming down the stretch just making it happen.

Q. I want to talk about restoring the image of the program that Debbie built. The last two years were a little bit of a mess. So can you do anything else besides from winning to just put Virginia back in a good image state?

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: I mean, I wasn't here, and I don't really care to talk about the past. I just really want to talk about the present and the future and where we're trying to go.

And I think that the program is going to reflect the leader of the program. So I'm somebody that always carries myself with class and grace. I'm a genuine person. I'm a God-fearing woman. And I just have people's best intentions always at heart.

So I'm just going to pour into our players. And I want them to understand the lessons that they can learn from this game, and it's not just about on the court. I want to make sure they're prepared for life.

So we're going to do a lot of things to help them continue to grow and understand that things are bigger than basketball. I say it all the time -- bigger than buckets. So I think that will reflect, from the way that we carry ourselves and the way that we compete on the court and the way we get out into the community and speak and get to know

people. I think you'll see just a change, I guess, in that regard.

Q. You grew up in Northern Virginia. You went to Oakton High School. Do you still have family in the state? If so, what does it mean to be closer to home?

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Being home, there's no better feeling, to be honest. I didn't really know if that was going to happen ever in my career just because jobs take you everywhere, I guess, in this business. I've spent a lot of time away from home -- Indiana University, Michigan State, Missouri. I spent a lot of time in the Midwest.

I have tons of family that lives in Northern Virginia, D.C., Maryland, that whole DMV area. So they are ecstatic. People are already planning to be season ticket holders, come down here. They're asking if I'm here already because they're trying to come. This is a workday where some people couldn't make it. But it's a blessing.

For me, I grew up around family. We have a huge family. Lots of cousins, aunts, uncles, things like that. I want my son to be able to grow up in that atmosphere. My husband is excited to be closer to family. There's nothing like it. I think, to me, it's the best possible situation for me personally and professionally.

Q. Who has been the biggest influence on your career, your basketball career? And when you find yourself with questions you don't have answers for, who do you go to as sort of a guru? I imagine it's probably the same person.

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Yeah, first of all, God has been the biggest influence on my life and my career. But I mean, I have a lot of, I guess you could say, mentors. One, my college coach, Felisha Legette-Jack. She's the head coach at Buffalo right now. I worked for her at Indiana as well when she was at Indiana University.

Katie Abrahamson-Henderson, a really good friend of mine, she's the head coach at Central Florida. My high school coach Fred Priester. He's at Oakton High School. Coach Ryan knows him pretty well. There's multiple coaches along the way.

But I tried to just stay grounded with a small circle I can trust. Not that there aren't other people that I do turn to at times. And my faith in God really helps drive me.

Q. You touched on this a little bit. But when you look around at these facilities and location, you're familiar with all of that. Just how much, maybe, potential do you see in this program once you kind of start building

things?

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: It's endless. Honestly, there's no reason why we can't win here. This facility is by far one of the best that I've seen. And I've been at some schools with top-in-the-country facilities. But this is, if not the best I've seen. And I don't think you can compare it to -- our locker room, from our locker room to the recovery area, the weight room, offices, to me it's the best in the country, honestly.

And I'm not just saying that. After I took my tour yesterday, I called Carla and told her that. We'll get recruits on campus. They will be wowed by that, which is great. But to me people make the place. And I think people here are just first-class people. I believe in my ability to recruit, my staff's ability to recruit, which is great. But to me, people make the place. And I think people here, interest, I guess you could say, from recruits right now reaching out to us before we even reach out to them.

So I just think that the potential is endless. We're going to get this thing going. And I'm just excited.

Q. I asked Carla about her background with basketball, playing and coaching. For you as a coach to have an AD with that connection to the sport, is that an advantage? Is it pressure? How do you view kind of her level of understanding of what it is you'll be doing?

COACH AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Yeah, I think it's an advantage. I don't ever really see anything as pressure. Let me backtrack for a second. When I got to Missouri State. I was the first-ever African American female coach in any sport at that university. They're coming off a Sweet 16. They wanted somebody, the community wanted somebody else for the job.

So I always used those situations that others may see as pressure as opportunity for people to understand me and get to know me and for me to leave my mark. So I don't think anything as pressure. I just handle it in a different way. That's just me personally.

Now, as far as Carla, I love how passionate she is about athletics in general. But women's basketball is close to her heart. And I understand that. I think that's great. When we were at the men's game the other day and we were up there in the suite, I was just listening to some of the things she was saying. And you can tell that she's a basketball-head and a coach at heart. So I love that.

I think it adds some relatability and we can talk basketball a little bit. And you know that she's going to always have

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

your back and understand what you're going through and understand different circumstances and things that can happen on the court. So to me it's not pressure. To me it's just more of support. And I truly appreciate her investment in it.

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