

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Regional 3 Final - Ohio State vs Virginia Tech

Sunday, March 26, 2023

Seattle, Washington, USA

Climate Pledge Arena

Virginia Tech Hokies

Kenny Brooks

Georgia Amoore

D'asia Gregg

Cayla King

Elite 8 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll get started. We'll start with an opening statement from coach and then take questions.

KENNY BROOKS: Obviously, thrilled to be here still. Very, very happy, very happy for our kids, happy for this program, just to be able to accomplish the things we've accomplished all season long, but particularly of late. The kids were able to celebrate and enjoy last night and then kind of real quickly had to shift our focus on to a different opponent.

So excited to be here, though, very happy for the kids, and it's a wonderful opportunity for our program.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Questions.

Q. In terms of the challenges of Ohio State press, what do you think you need to do better against the press tomorrow than you did yesterday? And do you feel like you've seen enough pressing teams this year where it's not going to throw you too much?

KENNY BROOKS: Well, I mean, every game is a preparation for the next game and so forth. We play a lot of teams in the ACC who press, just probably not to the magnitude of what Ohio State does. Their commitment to the press is very thorough. I've been watching 'em all year long. Good friends with Kevin. Just marvel at what they have been able to do, sustain. It's kind of funny, people were kind of, not ridiculing, but making a good point to tell



us that we only played six yesterday, our depth. They only played seven, and they're pressing.

So it's a different animal. We're watching film. We're continuing to watch film. I think the one thing that gets overlooked, yeah, their press is really, really good, but their offense is good too. They run some really good actions. Very similar to what we run, a lot of similarities. So we can't just lock in and hone in on just the press. Their offense is good too. We got to take away some things.

But yesterday, we had -- I think we had 18 turnovers. A lot of people want to jump on that. In this day and age, 18 turnovers is not that bad, it's really not, especially how you're playing. We want to be aggressive. Yeah, we turned it over a couple times when we wouldn't -- when we shouldn't have, but that's basketball. When you're playing teams like that, some things are going to happen.

We have to make sure that we limit our live ball turnovers. Just can't give them the basketball for at least the 2 points and then they come back and press you again. It would almost be more beneficial to throw it up into the stands so we can set our defense up as opposed to giving them live ball turnovers.

Q. If memory serves me correctly, you faced Ohio State back in 2015 when you were the head coach at JMU. How do you think you've grown as a coach since then?

KENNY BROOKS: You know what? I did face 'em when I was at JMU. But we also faced 'em while I've been here. We played 'em in Florida at a tournament. We won that game. I think it was one of my first couple years here. Everything's different. Styles are extremely different. The last two times I played 'em they didn't press and all of a sudden they're a pressing team, and they do it, and they do it extremely well. So every game is different. The difference between the first couple teams and the JMU teams is that we have good players too. So now we have an opportunity -- give ourselves an opportunity to win.

But like I said, good friends with Kevin and we had an opportunity to talk this summer, ironically me, him, and Jeff



kind of sitting around and talking about some things. All three of us have an opportunity to get to a Final Four berth. So it's good -- our kids are ready. They've played against top-level competition and that's prepared us for moments like this.

Q. What did you see or what have you seen from Cotie McMahon and the way she's able to make such an impact as a freshman, including even yesterday in the Sweet 16?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, she's well beyond her years. She's extremely talented. She's physically imposing. She is fearless. She's talented. It's kind of funny, I have a 17-year-old daughter and once a year I'll take her in the summertime and let her tag along with me on a trip, a recruiting trip. And one of these ones we happened to sit down and watch Cotie. And she doesn't really know people's names, but she knows Cotie McMahon's name. And we've been watching them during the year, and she's like, There's that Cotie girl. And I'm like, Yeah, that's that Cotie girl. She's really good. And now all of a sudden we're facing her.

But that's how much of an impact she can have on just the casual fan or anyone and she's so imposing. But she's well beyond her years. We understand that. She's going to be a handful. Don't think that we're going to shut her down, but we got to try to make things as difficult as possible for her.

Q. Can you just expand on your relationship with Kevin, when did you get to know him, what's kind of the origin of that friendship, and how has it grown?

KENNY BROOKS: Probably the times we competed a little bit. I think we had a mutual respect for each other when I was at James Madison, and then even at when I came here at Virginia Tech. We'll call each other, I don't know maybe once, twice a year, but we also see each other on the road. I've always stated I'm a big fan of his. I think the last time I actually corresponded with him was when they played Tennessee this year, ironically. And they beat Tennessee very handily. I sent him a text and I just told him how much fun it was to watch his team unbeknownst to me that I'm going to be trying to scout against him to try to beat them. That's not a whole lot of fun anymore.

But just seeing each other, always rooting for each other, giving each other any kind of advice we can. But I've always admired him and what he's done and our friendship has just really grown over the years.

Q. When you think about the beginning of your team's current win streak, I think it was against Virginia in

January, was there any particular kick in the pants that inspired you or a schematic change that you guys did or you guys just sort of figured out how to play better together?

KENNY BROOKS: No, we were coming together. We had won a couple games. We've have only loss four games all year, so it's not like we were down and out, by any means, at any stretch of the year. We were just really trying to figure ourselves out.

But the turning point, we do have a turning point. I think we had two of 'em. Um, when we got beat at Duke, the game before Virginia. They really manhandled us. They really put pressure on Georgia. They were extremely physical with her. They were extremely physical with Liz. From that point on, we developed a mantra. It was like, okay, we have to be physical and not -- a lot of times when people say you got to be physical, they're talking about the defensive end, be physical, be physical, be physical. But we took that to also mean we need to be physical on the offensive end.

Duke pushed us around. We didn't get to our spots. They were pushing us off the ball. We were falling down. We were looking around. And I remember after that game, I didn't go into the locker room. I didn't yell. I just said, You know what? Don't let this make us go backwards. Let it kick us forward. We know what we have to do now. Kids came in, understood what we needed to do to accomplish our goals, and so we really got on a run.

But then we had a stretch starting with NC State and it was five games that were going to be against ranked opponents. It was NC State twice, it was Duke, it was North Carolina, and it was Florida State, who was top 25 at that time. And we went through that stretch, I mean, clean. I think we won every game by double digits, with the exception of North Carolina, and that was a buzzer beater. And I thought -- because we didn't have a mentality of, okay, if we can win three out of five, we'll be in good position. It was like, take 'em one at a time. And we focused on one game at a time and we got through it. And I think that gave us a lot of confidence that if we just focused on the task at hand, we can beat anyone at any time, and that really propelled us to what we are now.

Q. Six of the eight teams that are left in the Elite 8 are ACC or Big Ten teams. You guys obviously play the ACC Big Ten Challenge every year that's going away in a couple years, but what about these two leagues has prepared your team and the other teams that are playing against each other to be in this position to play in the Elite 8?



KENNY BROOKS: A lot of good teams, a lot of good players, a lot of good coaches. I'm going to miss the Big Ten Challenge. Our style is similar to the Big Ten. We play a style that's very similar to the Big Ten. We don't get out and we don't do a whole lot of pressing and try to get out in the passing lanes. We're going to play good defense, good solid defense, and then -- I love the offenses that people run in the Big Ten.

I think there's a lot of similarities, but when you get this point in time, maybe some teams are an anomaly that they want to press and do a lot of different things at this juncture in the year because of fatigue factors. But a lot of the teams that are left they're really solid on the defensive end and they're very efficient on the offensive end, and I think those are a lot of the teams that you see with the Big Ten. Some of us from the ACC.

But it's just a lot of good teams and a lot of good players, and I think that's an equation to have some success.

Q. You guys have seen a lot of teams that press, the Clemsons and the Miamis, the Louisvilles, Dukes. How has your team grown in the ability to break the press as Taylor Seoul has gotten more involved with that? I mean, you've mentioned it before, the conversation you guys had after that Miami game, it seemed like everything kind of came more naturally to her in terms of helping you guys break that after that.

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, when you are dealing with a press and a team who presses the majority of the game, it's all hands on deck. You can't just rely on one. But Georgia's phenomenal at getting through and breaking the presses. But it does wear you down. So we have learned early -- we have learned that we can't just rely on her to break the pressure because we need her to do so many other things. We need her to set up our offense, we need her to score, we need her to defend. And to ask her to break the press solely by herself, that's just too much on her.

So we will do it by committee. She will be the mainstay in breaking it, but Taylor Soule is going to have to be able to do it. Sometimes she's a runaway freight train coming down the lane, but she's going to have to do it under control and at least where she can set us up and get us into some offenses by breaking it with her athleticism.

Kayana Traylor is going to have to be a little bit more involved with that. Cayla King is going to have to help. Elizabeth Kitley is going to have to be an outlet. We can't just rely on George to do it all because that will wear her down. The kids understand that. We've got a couple different things that we're going to do, a couple tweaks that

we're going to talk about today. But that's what you have to do in order to be successful against a team like Ohio State.

Q. Two part question: First one, you said the team took a little bit of time to celebrate. Did you take a minute to soak in what you had accomplished by getting to the Elite 8?

KENNY BROOKS: About three minutes, yeah. No, but it's one of my things this year is stop and smell the roses. I did. I really did. I actually took -- I actually took the time to answer I think all 272 questions -- I mean text messages that I had. The problem with answering 272 is that you probably get another 250 responses after you reply to them, and I don't really think people understand that we are on West Coast time. My phone at 5 o'clock in the morning is going crazy for the double responses.

But to answer your question, yes, I did take a little bit of time to reflect and to enjoy the moment.

Q. The second part is: There are a bunch of new teams in the Elite 8. Either you or Ohio State's going to make the Final Four and that's the first time for them in a long time and first time for you guys in forever. What does it mean to see -- is there a natural progression of the game that there are new teams coming in, maybe it's a sign that the game's growing, that there's more teams out there that can do it?

KENNY BROOKS: To me, it means everything. I just finished watching San Diego State beat Creighton for an opportunity to go to the Final Four on the men's side. That's good for women. That's good for women's basketball because it's not just the same teams going. There's a new excitement.

What I'm proud of, our kids are -- our kids are students of the game. They love the game. They read everything, they know everything that you guys put out there, but with a caveat. They don't get mad. They don't get mad at the fact that somebody wrote is this the next chapter of Tennessee versus UConn. You know, they respect the history of it and what it has meant, but they love the opportunity to take that and not be mad about it, not mad motivated, but they're like, okay, well, we'll show you. But they're not going to tell you that they were mad about it. We'll just go on to the next thing.

I think that's the beauty because these kids have dreamed -- they didn't dream of playing for Tennessee or UConn. They dreamed of getting to the Final Four, the Elite 8, the Final Four, and now they're accomplishing those goals. And I want them to relish in it. I want them to understand

what they have accomplished for Virginia Tech because I know the story behind UConn. They weren't UConn for a long time until -- when Geno first got there, they weren't UConn. They built it.

So our kids are understanding moment, they appreciate it, but I do think that it's wonderful for women's basketball. I think the evolution of the transfer portal is going to give parity to the sport, and so to give teams who normally hadn't made it an opportunity to do it, so then I think the unpredictability is going to be really good for our sport.

Q. Now that you're one win from the Final Four, what are you noticing today about the team's mentality, the team's mindset, now that you are just one win from the Final Four and the fact that big bad UConn is not the team standing in your way?

KENNY BROOKS: You know what? They're the exact same. We came down for breakfast this morning. They got to walk around a little bit. They're enjoying the moment, but they're not in awe. They're not like okay -- I mean, we -- as the kids will tell you, we were the 1 seed. Okay? We were the 1 seed. And for people to be like, Wow, you guys are here, it's almost like, Okay, wow, you guys are still here. Yeah, we're supposed to be here. That's what we accomplished all year long to get to this moment to still be here.

But they understand, they expect to be here. They expect to be here. They will tell you real quick, We're a 1 seed. We're a 1 seed. So it's still business at hand. It doesn't matter if it was UConn in front of us, Ohio State, or the Lakers. We're going to come and we're going to lock in and we're going to focus because we know that we still have to play a great opponent to get to where we want to get to.

Q. Since you know the JMU and UNC coaches so well and they played Ohio State in this tournament, have you talked to them at all to get any kind of a scouting report or opinions from them?

KENNY BROOKS: No. No, I have not. Obviously, it's quick turnaround. But I have the best staff in the country. I really do. The way they work, they're prepared for moments like this. So we know our personnel and what it does and so we haven't reached out and talked to them.

THE MODERATOR: That's all the time we have. We'll have the student-athletes from Virginia Tech in momentarily.

(Pause.)

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. You guys are one win from the Final Four. What's kind of the mentality, the mindset, of the team today now that you're this close to the Final Four and the fact that UConn is not the team standing in your way?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Ohio State is still a very good team, so I mean, UConn or not, we're still playing a very talented team and as we will if we continue to win. The mindset for us hasn't changed, though. It's one game at a time and just giving it our all every game.

CAYLA KING: We didn't come this far to just make it this far, so we're just, again, taking it one game at a time and hopefully continue on to Dallas.

Q. Two questions: First, your coach yesterday made a reference to Jurassic Park, and I'm wondering, did you guys know he likes Jurassic Park this much? Because this is something we are all learning for the first time.

GEORGIA AMOORE: He calls our defense the raptors.

CAYLA KING: Raptors.

GEORGIA AMOORE: Like, a pack of raptors. We hunt in packs. I've never seen the movie, though, so -- I don't know if he know that's or not.

CAYLA KING: But, yeah.

Q. Second thing is: You guys are in this situation for the first time ever. What things are you trying to do just to not let the pressure get to you guys? How are you guys keeping it light and trying to keep yourselves from feeling too much? I know you said, even though you're the 1 seed, you feel like the underdog but just trying not to let the pressure get to you guys.

GEORGIA AMOORE: I think the end of our season that we had kind of prepared us for this. We played a bunch of talented teams back-to-back-to-back. I think it tested us a lot. We came out with wins, but we definitely learned a lot from that final season stretch and like the ACC tournament.

CAYLA KING: I would say both the ACC tournament and playing Duke, Carolina, and NC State all at their home courts. They have great crowds, so it's hard to play in front of all those people, and they're a great team. So I think all those things prepared us for this.

D'ASIA GREGG: Yeah, same. The ACC prepared us for this. It's a pretty tough conference and, yeah, they

prepared us for this type of play.

Q. Georgia, Kenny talked about the Duke loss in January. What do you feel like you learned in that loss or about how they were guarding you, about the physicality and what you needed to do for the rest of the year on out?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yeah, I just needed to be more aggressive. Because I faced a lot of different defenses, but that Duke one caught me really off guard. And ever since then I learned from that because I was sick to my stomach after that loss, like absolutely sick. So it sucks that we lost but it was good, a good learning curve.

Q. First of all, love the bucket hat. Was that, is that, is there somewhere we could purchase that?

D'ASIA GREGG: This was a gift during the first round. Yeah.

Q. That wasn't actually my question, but I did need to get that out of the way. Georgia, Kenny was saying yesterday, the beginning of the year, because of all the new transfers, you took more of a passive role and wanting to facilitate and make sure everyone got incorporated into the fold. But that he really encouraged you to kind go out there and be the best player on the floor. So whether or not that was from losses like the Duke loss or other points this season, what were those conversations like as he kind of pushed you to be even more assertive and to kind of play like you have over the last few weeks?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yeah, I don't think we had like direct conversations, but it's more so just him like feeding the confidence into me all the time. Like during practice the feedback that I get from him -- and it's not always positive, like obviously he's still my coach at the end of the day -- but just knowing and understanding for us to be able to do what we want to do I have to be like uber aggressive. And that definitely helps because we have shooters and drivers and Liz is in there too and she cops a beating every single night. So for me to be more aggressive on the outside helps open it up for not only her but all the other girls too.

Q. For all of you, Kenny talked a lot about the notion of stopping and smelling the roses, stop and smell the roses. I guess for each of you, is there one moment that you feel like you can share in which you have stopped and smelled the roses?

D'ASIA GREGG: Me personally I haven't yet. I'm worried about the game right now. I'll probably be able to do that after this season, but right now I'm kind of focused on

winning a championship.

CAYLA KING: I think all of us are really just like taking it one game at a time really. Again, because we just didn't want to make it this far to come this far. So I think after the season we'll be able to look back and really relish in it.

GEORGIA AMOORE: I think in saying that we're not getting too caught up in everything that's to lie ahead, I think we're definitely not completely satisfied with what we've done, but very much I would say happy with what we've accomplished. But it's nothing to stop and reminisce on because obviously there's still so much more to be done.

Q. Georgia, as far as that Ohio State press, what do you want to do better as a team against the press tomorrow than you did yesterday and do you feel like you guys have seen enough pressing teams this year where you're not going to be too thrown by it?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yes, we didn't really prepare for Tennessee to press like that leading up to it. Which, we still are a smart team, we should have understood that better. But we have plenty of press breaks and I'm sure we'll go over some of that today. But I think just being really intentional. We can't throw any lob passes or any -- we can't have any sloppy plays in that press.

Q. Have you played enough pressing teams?

CAYLA KING: I think the whole ACC teams, Duke, Louisville, Miami, they're all aggressive styles and they all pressed at some points in the game. So playing those teams throughout the year and the ACC tournament I think has prepared us some for this.

Q. For any of you. There's always a lot made how conference tournaments are tougher to win than the NCAA because you have to play back-to-back-to-back games. Curious your thoughts now you're going through the NCAA's is it tougher to win the conference in a sense because you have no recovery time and rest time and prep time versus you have a day today to get ready for tomorrow?

D'ASIA GREGG: I feel like it's kind of the same. It's a quick turnaround, so we don't really have that much time to recover. We just took, we just take a game at a time and it's just a mental part. We try to stay sharp with our mental so we don't have mental lapses. So it just like a mental part of the game.

CAYLA KING: I think with the ACC tournament, like we're all familiar with the teams. The NCAA, you play different

conferences, there's different styles of basketball, so that's kind of a new aspect of the game. But honestly, like, the ACC the quick turnarounds you don't, like you think you'll be way more tired than you are, but your body tricks you into being okay. At the end of the tournament I was like, dang, like, I'm sore. But the day of the championship game we were all good, we were ready to play.

GEORGIA AMOORE: I would say the adrenaline is like cranked all the way up.

CAYLA KING: You don't realize -- you don't feel anything until after those three days of playing.

GEORGIA AMOORE: We cut down the net and I was like walking down the ladder like, oooh, man. (Laughing.)

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you.

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