

# Atlantic Coast Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Sunday, March 5, 2023

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

**Virginia Tech Hokies**

**Coach Kenny Brooks**

**Georgia Amoore**

**Elizabeth Kitley**

Postgame Press Conference



Virginia Tech 75, Louisville 67

**KENNY BROOKS:** I'm so proud. So proud to be associated with this group, this university, this athletic program. The resiliency that these kids showed throughout the year, the support that we got from Hokie Nation all year long. I knew when these kids came and they committed to us, I knew eventually we were going to be playing for different things, and they proved me right.

They worked diligently every day. The two kids to my left are probably the most perfectionist people I've ever seen, and they've always believed in themselves.

We don't have McDonald's All-Americans, we have kids who come in, and they work, they work, they work. Liz has proven that she's the best player in the league. Georgia has proven that she's the most important. Together their friendship, just the camaraderie with this group, allows us to go out and compete on the highest level.

Watching everything come to fruition, I sold them both a vision, they went out and they executed it. We said we'd be here. We said we would be here, and we never wavered. It didn't matter who we were playing, and we proved that we were one of the elite teams in the country. I'm so excited.

As far as the game is concerned, they all played well. They all played well.

Normally you can talk about this or that, somebody stepped up, Georgia had 25, Liz had 20, but they all did something very special.

Cayla King scored four points, and she did a phenomenal job on Hailey Van Lith, phenomenal. Taylor Soule didn't play a lot in the first half, but her energy in the second half, she chased around some of the guards. Everybody played well. D'asia Gregg played well, Kayana Traylor played well, Taylor Geiman gave us really good minutes. These kids, they're on a string. They're on a string. They're connected on both ends of the floor. We're not just an offensive team, we're a defensive team, and defense wins championships.

We said we were going to be here. I also want to give a shout out to my man Shawn Poppie. He won a championship today. He won a championship today. I talked to him earlier, and I was like, did you ever imagine we'd be thousands of miles away playing for a championship on the same day? So he and I talked a little bit, so I'm sure he's left me a message. I can't wait to talk to him.

I'm very, very happy for these kids. It's a big family. It's a family and they deserve it, so I'm very excited about what they've done, and I'm excited about what we can do.

**Q. Liz, winning this in your hometown, you and Cayla, you didn't want to think about that, but now you can think about it. What's that like for you guys?**

**ELIZABETH KITLEY:** It's really cool. My family has always showed up for me. They haven't missed a game this year besides Bahamas, so I'll give them that. My aunts flew in, people from high school came. We had a ton of people in maroon and orange, and it felt like a home game at times, and I think that benefitted us and gave us a lot of energy. It's really cool to win the whole thing in front of all your loved ones.

**Q. Kenny, when you sit back and think, it took seven years to get to this point, all of the players that came through the program, the Aisha Sheppards, the Taylor Emerys, the Taja Coles, to get to this point and see Georgia, all the lengths you went to recruiting her, to be on this stage next to you, the combination of everything, what's going through your mind? What does this mean to you and the way that you guys have**



## accomplished this?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, we didn't just accomplish it this year. Like you mentioned, we came in here -- and I think my first year we were preseason No. 13 in the ACC. To build it, it took a lot. We had to build it from the ground up. We had to change the culture. And there were a lot of people along the way, like I mentioned, Shawn Poppie, the Britney Anderson, a lot of people who stepped up, Jennifer Brown, coaches, a lot of people who did a lot for this program to get it off and running.

And then you have the players. We were trying to find out way. I've often said that kids like Vanessa Panousis who's an Australian, Sammy Hill, they taught me what it was to be a Hokie. They taught me what it was to be a Hokie. Then we brought in a couple transfers like Taja Cole and Lydia Rivers. They were seniors to these kids, and they showed them the way and how to do it, and now they've taken it to a different level, obviously, but it's the culture.

It isn't for everyone. I'm not going to sit here and say it's for everyone. But these kids, if you buy into it and what we're doing and believe in it, things like this can happen. These kids bought in, they understand it. Their legacy will long live at Virginia Tech.

When I go home tonight -- everybody kept coming up to me, this is the first, this is the first, this is the first. So many firsts. We're going to sit back and enjoy it. We're on spring break, right? Yeah, we're on spring break. So we're going to enjoy it this week to be able to sit back. I couldn't be prouder of a group for the way that they've fought. We said it was going to be a special year, and it's come true.

## **Q. Coach, after Louisville's defense challenged you in the third quarter, you came out on that 7-0 run. How critical was that to jump start the rest of the game?**

KENNY BROOKS: Their defense was good tonight. They mixed it up. We got stagnant a couple times when they went to the zone, but we made some big shots. We made some hustle plays. Their pressure kind of just threw us out of rhythm a little bit, but they're good. They're very good. They were picked to win this thing this year.

But we've grown up a lot. This is only the second time that I've beaten Louisville, and it comes on a really grand stage.

We just really kept our composure. That's one of the things that this group has done. We've gone through it the last month and a half where we've kept our composure in very dire situations, and we've come out on top because of their maturity, and today was no different.

## **Q. Kenny, I wanted to ask you about the defensive match-ups. I think it was around the media time-out in the first quarter, you said Taylor Soule doesn't play much in the first half. But when she did in the early second half, you had her on Hailey Van Lith. What was the thinking that went into that game plan?**

KENNY BROOKS: We felt like we have four kids that could do a good job on her. She's a prolific scorer. They go through her. She's going to get her attempts. We wanted to just make it difficult for her.

I thought we mixed it up. We started Kayana Traylor on her and KT is fast, getting over the screens. And then we went to a situation where Cayla King was guarding her and her length, I think, bothered her. Cayla is one of the smarter players that we have. Then it's kind of like finishing up with Taylor Soule who's a ball of energy and long and athletic.

I don't think she really got comfortable with all the different looks that she got, and we wanted to do that by design.

## **Q. For each of the players, Liz, you said yesterday you guys wanted this really bad. Now that you've achieved this goal and as you think of how much the program has grown in recent years, what does it mean to have accomplished this goal?**

ELIZABETH KITLEY: Yeah, I'm not really -- no, it hasn't fully sunk in yet, but I'm sure that it will over the next few weeks. But it's awesome to have that banner in Cassell. It's going to be there forever and remind me of it.

Yeah, just can't say enough about Coach Brooks and what he's done for this program and for me personally. It's just really awesome for everything that we talked about to happen. One of our biggest goals, we did it together, and I'm just really proud and happy.

GEORGIA AMOORE: I don't even know, like it really hasn't sunk in. I'm sure in the next week when we have spring break and we don't have anything to do, I'm going to be really thinking about it.

But it's so good. It's so good for Virginia Tech and the women's program. It's so good for Coach Brooks. He's my Coach of the Year. He always will be. He's done so much for us, so much for the team. Just look at the program. Like it's just on an upward trend, and I think it's really solidified what he's doing and it's solidified Virginia Tech as a legit contender. And I'm super proud of that because we deserve the respect.

## **Q. Georgia, you're obviously a long way from home.**



**Is your family able to watch at all? Have you heard from them? What has this Virginia Tech family meant to you?**

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yeah, the two prior games I had to send them a Dropbox link, but this game was at 5:00 a.m. and they streamed it on like Kayo, which I think is an Australian version of a sports broadcasting thing. Mum posted on Facebook, and I think a lot of people woke up early for that, which was great.

But as much as I wish they could be here, seeing all the maroon and orange in the stands was absolutely incredible. Like Cassell guard, the students came down and all the alums and that. That is like the family, and that felt so great to have them all there cheering us on.

**Q. Georgia, as you look at this three-day run you were on, what do you point to to say this is why I was able to be so prolific and successful during this tournament?**

GEORGIA AMOORE: Our team just wanted it so bad, and we knew that we were going to win it from the start. We were saying we were going to win it, and we just all had to believe and give every single ounce of effort. The effort was just a huge factor. Honestly, the way that Taylor Soule played, the way that D'asia Gregg played, Liz Kitley, Cayla King, Kayana Traylor, all of them, that is all MVP. We're the best team, so it equals out.

**Q. Liz, apparently -- I was talking to your dad and mom and you and Cayla used to come here in second grade to watch the tournament. Do you remember anything from those days coming here?**

ELIZABETH KITLEY: I remember high school. My memory is terrible in general, but I mean, yeah, we would come in high school. We watched Arike Ogunbowale, we watched Notre Dame, we watched Louisville win. For it to be us and for Virginia Tech to have champions next to it is incredible, and I'm so happy that we've seen this.

**Q. Kenny, you've won I think 11 straight games now. Are you kind of entering into the tournament on a perfect roll, and are you a little uneasy that you're now going to be off for a week and a half?**

KENNY BROOKS: No, they need the time off. I need the time off. They've been going really hard. This is the most professional group that we have. These two right here, they have -- is it FOMO? They have fear of missing out. There's a lot of times where I wouldn't let them practice, and they would fight me on it and they would -- it's kind of like a little kid when you tell them -- you're a kid and you tell

them to go to bed, and they're like, can I get five more minutes, can I get 10 more minutes.

And I'd tell them -- we started it probably about that time we started the win streak, where I started resting them during practice. Reluctantly, they got used to it, and so they were able to finish like we wanted to finish.

It was a very tough stretch we had. You think about the last five games, six games of our regular season, we played four or five teams that were ranked and then playing the teams that we had to play in the tournament. They need the time off. They deserved it. They've worked really hard. We'll get back at it probably Thursday or Friday, a little bit of conditioning. Perfect timing because we get some time off. They're on spring break. I think they'll probably stay here in Greensboro and just get back at it.

I'm excited for them to get the rest and have nothing on their brain. They have no school, they have no nothing, so they'll be able to just rest and relax a little bit.

**Q. You guys were 25 of 27 from the free-throw line. What does that say about your mental toughness down the stretch?**

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, it's great because you look at it, Louisville never gave up, and they kept hitting shots, big three. I just kept saying, okay, if they miss that one, the game is over with, and they kept making them. Georgia kept getting the basketball, they fouled her, she made her free throws. Liz got fouled towards the end, she made her free throws. That just sealed the deal. We wanted to finish the game the right way. But give Louisville credit, they never gave up and they get some big threes towards the end.

**Q. On what you were saying about the win streak and the stretch, 11 straight wins, eight of them quad 1. ESPN's bracketologist has you as the No. 4 overall seed on the 1 line. What would that accomplishment mean to you? Was that a specific goal coming into the season?**

KENNY BROOKS: Well, you know, that's crazy. That's surreal. The first year we made the tournament -- the first year, Liz's freshman year, Georgia was here sitting out, COVID sit, and we were score-watching, and we didn't care if we were a 29 seed. We just wanted to get in.

Then the first year we were able to play in it, I think we were a 7 seed. And in my time in James Madison we were just happy whatever seed you gave us. We just wanted to be in the tournament.



Then when I got here and we made the tournament and we saw the importance of getting a good seed -- because you're a 7 seed, you play a 10 seed, Marquette, you might be able to win. Then, oh, here comes Baylor. We all remember the Baylor game. The Baylor game kicked us forward. We understood that.

We played last year and we were a 5 seed, and we got what we didn't feel like was a 12 seed, but we understood the importance of a seed.

So I've talked to them. They understand it. We don't just talk about getting in. They watch Bracketology. We talk about it. They understand it, if we're this, if we're that. First and foremost, we wanted to host, and then we wanted to string this stretch. And all of a sudden we were a 4 seed, then a 3 seed, then a 2 seed. Now you mention maybe it could even be a 1 seed, borderline.

But that just shows you the growth of this program. We talked about it. We could do whatever we wanted to with the group we had coming in. We felt that confident, and we really still feel that way.

**Q. You're the first Black head coach to win an ACC Tournament. It's been a historic year for Black coaches in the league. Of course over the summer last summer Charlene Curtis who was a trailblazer passed away. Just want to know what it means to you to be part of that legacy.**

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, I loved Charlene. Charlene was very instrumental in my career. Love her to death.

To this honor, I didn't know it until they told me after the game. If you would have asked me about five, ten years ago, I wouldn't have embraced it as much. Honestly, being a Black head coach in a women's sport, it is tough. It really is. I'm the only Power Five head coach that's a Black male, and I think that there are coaches out there that are definitely worthy of an opportunity.

For me, I've embraced that role. I've embraced it when people come up to me, other coaches, when they text me, when they DM me.

I think what really opened my eyes to it was all the social injustices that we were going through. This group right here -- my team is a very diverse group. And I remember when it was all going on, and we had division -- not within our group -- but it was the Black and the white. And I had my Black kids who they were angry because of the situation and the things that were going on, they were fed up. I had this group right here who had never experienced

prejudice in their life. They didn't really understand it.

I had to bring the two groups together to make sure that they all understood, that we educated each other on the whole situation. In doing so, I had to open myself up, and I was very vulnerable because they look at me and they've looked at me for a long time as the leader, and they don't understand that I had to go through struggles.

I've been called bad words. I've been called those words before, that they hear that are so disgusting to them. I've been discriminated against.

I won a lot of basketball games at James Madison, and it took Whit Babcock to give me a call before I had an opportunity to get to this level. I've embraced the opportunity now, and I'm championing for a lot of my fellow peers. And I think that if I can continue to run a program like this and I can continue to win and we win on a big stage, I think it can open up doors for a lot of other guys who look like me.

I get it; if there's a situation where it's me and a female and we're equal, yeah, give the opportunity to the woman. I'm okay with that. But I also know that I'm good for the sport, and they've learned a lot from me, whether I'm a man or a woman. They just need great representation and great role models and people who believe in them.

These two kids right here, they can conquer the world. I have three daughters. I have three daughters that I want them to have every opportunity that any male would have. So I'm good for the game. There's a lot of Black coaches, males also, that are good for the game. Let's just get the best people out there, give them the opportunity and good things like this will happen.

They don't look at me as a Black male. They look at me as probably like a father figure, and we come in, and it doesn't matter. I can coach, I love them to death, and I'm going to try to give them everything, and there's a lot more guys out there like me.

Hopefully what I'm doing right now can open some eyes for some ADs, get good people out there that will do this, and it doesn't matter if they're man, woman, Black, white, green, whatever. Get good people and great things can happen in a program.

**Q. Georgia, the last time I spoke to you, you were mentioning to me that in your native Australia you never knew there was such a thing as a tournament. Today you're here with an MVP trophy and the school's first conference championship. Reflect on your transition from learning about something you didn't**



**know existed to where you're now carrying home some hardware.**

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yeah, I didn't know there was an ACC Tournament. We had tournaments at home but it wasn't win or go home. It was like based on percentages, so if you lost you could still have a chance, those type of things.

I mean, when I committed, I had no idea really what great things this could do. He sold me on the idea that all this could happen, but all that to me seemed like a fantasy. And when I got here from day one, it was always about putting us on the map and winning for the team.

I think the thing that really drove it for me last year honestly was watching the men's team win it. And this whole theme this year was we deserve one, too. We work hard. We put all the energy in, all the effort, and not only is it good for the program but for Virginia Tech. Like needed that banner, so I'm excited for it to hang up in the rafters.

KENNY BROOKS: We have two ACC championship trophies that will go in our Cassell Coliseum -- I mean Hahn Hurst for at least a couple days if men can make another run. That's pretty special for the trophy to be -- two trophies to be in the same building for Virginia Tech.

**Q. Just to clarify, you said earlier in the press conference that we said we were going to be here. You said that when? Was it before the tournament or was it before the season?**

KENNY BROOKS: It was before the season, it was the summer. These kids are motivated by a lot of different things. Last year when we didn't get to finish the right way, we watched NC State win it, that fueled them. They're really good friends are Elissa Cunane, and she was on the podcast and I'm sure she said something about winning a championship.

But every time we work out, every time we work out, we talk about it. We knew it could come true this year, and this summer we talked about the chemistry had to be important. Because you look at what we had, Georgia was already a budding superstar, and Liz is a superstar, ACC Player of the Year, and we added Taylor Soule, we added so many different pieces that we knew we were going to have to gel. We talked about if they were able to sacrifice and willing to sacrifice, the sky's the limit. They can be ACC champions.

As soon as the season started -- they're basketball junkies. They watch all games, ACC, Big Ten, SEC. Always a group chat. If I text them about a move, they're watching

the same game, and they knew -- real quick, we were like, you know what? We feel like we're the best team, and we can go out and win if we just come together.

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