

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Chattanooga vs Virginia Tech

Thursday, March 16, 2023

Blacksburg, Virginia, USA

Cassell Coliseum

Virginia Tech Hokies
Coach Kenny Brooks
Georgia Amooore
Elizabeth Kitley
Taylor Soule

Media Conference

Q. For the players, for the last few years, this has been the goal, not a 1 seed but to get to host in the NCAA Tournament. What does it mean to have accomplished this goal and have you started kind of visualizing what it might be like tomorrow to be playing in front of a full house for this NCAA Tournament?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yeah, definitely looking forward to it because obviously Cassell is sold out and to have that type of crowd for any women's event is absolutely incredible. But obviously hosting was a goal and I'm glad that we achieved that. But in the grand scheme of things, we still have a lot more to try and achieve.

ELIZABETH KITLEY: Yeah, I think hopefully we can just carry over the momentum that we had at the end of the regular season because we had a lot of support from Hokies fans. So hopefully, like she said, like it's sold out so everyone will show up and it'll be a really cool environment.

TAYLOR SOULE: Yeah, I'm excited. This is my first tournament experience at all really, so to do it with a great team, I'm excited, and to have the opportunity to play in front of great fans, so I'm excited for tomorrow.

Q. In the grand scheme of things, what more are you already thinking about?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Winning games in the tournament. Like we're here. That's an accomplishment, but we want to win, too, some games.



Q. This team hasn't been to the Sweet 16 in many, many years. That was kind of the goal for a while, to get to the Sweet 16. Now that you're the 1 seed, are you thinking bigger or are you thinking Final Four? How are you guys kind of looking at yourselves now that you have high expectations of a 1 seed?

TAYLOR SOULE: I think that our expectations for ourselves are through the roof. I know how I feel. I know how they feel. We want to compete for a National Championship. That's why we put the work in over the summer. That's why we compete now. Although our goal was to win an ACC championship in X, Y, Z, it's to win games, to prove people wrong, and to prove ourselves right that we are a great basketball team and we can compete with the best in the country.

ELIZABETH KITLEY: I agree with what Taylor said. We do have really high expectations for ourselves because we know how good we can be, and the strides we've made over the past few months have been incredible. So we just hope that takes us as deep as we can. But obviously we did originally talk as our goal being the Sweet 16 and everything. Just because that's our goal doesn't mean once we get there, we will be looking to go further.

GEORGIA AMOORE: They covered it pretty well.

Q. For any of you, what would you say have been the keys to success for this team all season long to claim this No. 1 seed?

TAYLOR SOULE: I would say the keys for success have been our defense and our confidence and our willingness to be selfless and kind of just encourage each other. Whether it's Georgia having 20 points a night, Liz, whoever it is, we just want what's best for the team. And it's shown in positive ways throughout the season, and that's what makes playing with them really fun.

ELIZABETH KITLEY: I think it's been also our ability to grow throughout the season. I think we've started to click at the right time. Obviously being on this winning streak, going into this time of year is awesome. I think that momentum definitely helped us, and will hopefully help us



throughout the next few games.

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yeah, just an unselfish group and clicking on all cylinders at the best time. I think early in the year, our defense wasn't quite there and I think that's why we had some close games and some losses. Figured that out, though, and now looking pretty good.

Q. Georgia, we talked a little bit after the selection show about what it's going to be like to play a team that runs similar stuff to you. When you guys watched film the last couple days, what's stood out to you about this Chattanooga team and what are you guys expecting going into tomorrow?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yeah, they definitely have their go-to players, and just like our offense, our plays have someone to go to or go through.

But without being funny, it's nothing we haven't guarded before, and we've watched scout and practiced it, and really up to us. It's just that we don't fall asleep or don't get too comfortable playing against it because the point of a lot of our offense is to lull you to sleep and then attack. Probably the same philosophy.

Q. There's still a lot of work to be done for you guys, but when you look back on this team, there will be banners hanging. What do you want people to remember about this group?

TAYLOR SOULE: I think what I want people to remember about this group is I think that we're great basketball players but we're great people, and we got the success that we've had this year by doing the right things at the right times. I think you can have great teams that don't have chemistry. You can have great teams that don't want what's best for the team. But this team genuinely wants people to succeed, for the program, for the community, for the people to the right and left of them. And I think that's what makes this group different from other teams that I've been on, and that's what I think is going to make this team one to remember.

Q. What's it been like to go through this with your sister?

ELIZABETH KITLEY: I mean, it's been really cool. I think she's gotten a lot of attention lately, which she loves. But it's just nice to have awareness brought to her and just in general, family relationships. She'll definitely be here cheering on, as she always is, and hopefully we can make her proud and happy.

Q. Is there some part of you that feels like a champion

for autism awareness, just kind of celebrating all she brings to your life?

ELIZABETH KITLEY: That's a nice title. I guess I could start using that.

I mean, I hope that it is seen that way, I guess. I just want recognition to be given to her that is possible or any awareness to be spread that can be. So I think media and Virginia Tech has done a great job of kind of not advertising but getting that information out there, and it's really cool to see people love it as much as our program does and my family does.

Q. Taylor, you said this is your first opportunity to play on this kind of stage. What does it mean to you and how excited are you to get out and play in front of a sold-out crowd in Cassell, and to think of where you were in high school to where you are now, what does it all mean to you?

TAYLOR SOULE: Yeah, no, definitely means a lot. It's why I came back, and for me the COVID year was definitely a blessing.

I was literally thinking the other day, I was like crying because I was like, I don't want to leave these girls already. Hopefully we can play as long as we can. But it's awesome. I'm blessed to be here. I'm excited and having fun playing basketball, and that's what it's all about.

Can't complain.

Q. Earlier you had said about looking to prove people wrong. Who were you looking to prove wrong?

TAYLOR SOULE: They know who they are.

I think just in general. I think wherever you are, whoever you are, not everyone is going to like you. Everyone is going to have an opinion, think you can't do stuff. But I think what's given us so much success is we don't really care what the outside people have to say. The people on the team, in the program trust and understand the hard work that we've put in and believe in us, and so that's all that really matters going down the stretch?

Q. For the players, some people said that even President Obama has you going to the Final Four. What are you feeling, and are you feeling any pressure as a 1 seed to kind of, okay, you're a 1 seed now, you need to live up to that?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Really can't look too far ahead. It is game by game. That's cliché, but it is March and that is



what it is. I haven't really been looking past Chattanooga.

ELIZABETH KITLEY: I think our experience last year helped us learn, as painful as it was, losing in the first round in the 12-5 matchup opened our eyes because we know we can't overlook any game. Every team is in this tournament because they're good and talented and they can win, so we just have to be ready game by game and just take it slow.

TAYLOR SOULE: I agree. 10 minutes at a time.

Q. You averaged about 18 points a game for each of the last three years. What's been the difference this year or have you noticed a difference this year, and if so, what is it.

ELIZABETH KITLEY: I don't know. I think with each year there's different players around me, so that makes the scoring different. Like having Taylor Soule this year, she just brings a whole completely different force on the inside. Georgia has been shooting the ball so well, so that opens up other looks, too.

Yeah, I don't know if it's like a specific thing, but just having different teammates every year, we run different stuff, or defenses play us differently, so that just needs to different offense.

Q. When you watch the Chattanooga film this week, because Shawn Poppie said he brought so many plays with him from Blacksburg -- so when you watch the film, are you like, okay, they're running that play so I know exactly where I need to be on defense and vice versa? What's it been like as you watched Chattanooga film in terms of recognition?

GEORGIA AMOORE: I mean, in theory, it's like similar actions, but it's not really the same plays. We have very different players. I think we have Liz, and like -- they space the floor, so it's very different. So very similar actions.

I think the gist of the plays is similar but he's not going to copy and paste a lot of things because he's smart. He's a very self-aware man, and he has his own flair. But also we can't just assume that we know it because if we assume that we know the plays, then obviously he has his adjustments. And I'm sure going into the tournament he's probably adding more.

But it's not copy and paste, to say.

Q. Kenny, have you and Shawn been talking this week or have you gone the cone of silence this week?

KENNY BROOKS: No, we'll never go silent except for the 40 minutes when we start tipping it up. You know, just very proud of him and what he's done, what he's accomplished in a very short time. Being able to dive into his team a little bit further and just see what they've done, what they've created there, very happy for him.

He actually came to the office yesterday and it was very weird seeing him. He walked in his old office and it was kind of weird seeing him walk the halls.

No, very happy for him. We'll always continue to talk, be supportive. He's got a lot going on in his personal life. He's about to have another baby, so a lot to talk about, but always going to be friends for life.

Q. They used the practice facility yesterday?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah.

Q. All the other teams do, too?

KENNY BROOKS: I don't know, I'm at home.

Q. When you've been watching Chattanooga film this week, is there a lot of recognition of he brought that play with him, I know what we need to do on defense and vice versa?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, it's very similar, and we knew it was going to be similar. Obviously we talk throughout the year, and he talked about things that he brought with him. It's not the same plays, but it's a lot of the same actions, and how you finish a play, kind of how they're going to get the basketball to certain people. Very, very similar.

We've been going over it a little bit, and kids are very familiar with it, almost to the point where we don't want them to be too familiar with it because we anticipate a wrinkle or two here or two. We just want to be able to play basketball.

But very, very similar, styles are similar. The way that he's constructed his team is almost similar. So it's a good first matchup because just we understand what they're trying to do. A lot of times when you step outside of the ACC -- we play, what, 21 straight ACC games, and now you're stepping out of it again.

So it's a good opponent to go and have some familiarity with.

Q. Kenny, for the last few years, this has been the goal hosting, not a 1 seed, but to be able to host the first two rounds. What does it mean to you to have

accomplished this goal and what's it going to mean to play in front of presumably a packed house tomorrow?

KENNY BROOKS: Well, I mean, it means a lot to our program. Obviously when you're trying to build it, you have to dream it before it can come to fruition. I've had a lot of time to sit back, reflect on where we were, how we got to this point.

One of the things I thought was pretty neat is that I think - you might have to double-check my memory -- but I think it was 2018 we went to The Finals of the WNIT, and we played Indiana. We were both, Teri Moren is a really good friend of mine, I admire her. I have like a coaching crush on her, the way she's run her program. And for us, too, trying to take programs to a different level, and we got to the championship game.

I remember we played in Assembly Hall and it was, I think, the biggest crowd at that point that they had ever had. And to fast-forward five years and both of us are No. 1 seeds, it goes to show you the importance of postseason and learning how to win.

We've always won since I've been here, but we've not always won the right games, and that's where we've really turned our attention to. Yeah, we can win 20 games, but we want to win 14 of those in the ACC.

That's where our program has come to, and the way the kids walk out and their expectations. We used to hope to win, and now we expect to win. I think that's a big difference when you get to this level. And when you've accomplished something -- I'm not going to sit here and downplay it. That's an accomplishment getting a No. 1 seed.

I had as many chills and a blackout moment when our name came up there as a No. 1 seed as I did three years ago when they announced us back into the tournament for the first time in 10 or so years. So major accomplishment. Very proud of our kids. We celebrated it, we embraced it, and we put it away. And now it's time to go out there and represent that No. 1 seed.

And we know people are going to come after us. We know people are going to doubt us. We know people say that maybe we shouldn't have got it, but we also know that there's a lot of people who say we should have gotten it. So it really doesn't matter what anybody else thinks, it matters what we think, and we just need to go out and prepare.

Q. You mentioned the importance of getting to that WNIT final a couple years ago. You have South Dakota

State who won the WNIT in your region right here. How much does that pose a problem for you that this is a veteran team that has postseason experience from just a year ago?

KENNY BROOKS: We're in a weird -- it's like the twilight zone right now because it seems like everybody you play is old. Obviously COVID giving everybody an extra year, you run into so many teams that are so experienced. And Aaron does a tremendous job with his program. First time I think I ever encountered Aaron, his program, we were in Cancun. I was at James Madison. I'll be honest I didn't know what a jackrabbit was, but after I watched them play and we experienced playing against them, you walked away and you knew that was a very well-coached basketball team who understood the assignment and that they were going to come out and play.

I've always been a fan of that. Not wanting to play against it, but the way that they play basketball.

After the euphoria left us a little bit after being a No. 1 seed and then you start looking forward, if you're fortunate enough to get past the first round, who would you have to play in the second round. And I kind of joked about the NCAA having a sick sense of humor putting me up against Poppie. But then it's also two contrasting styles of the games that we're going to have to play if we're fortunate enough to get to the second round, because South Dakota State, they play a totally different brand of basketball than Southern California.

But that's what the tournament is all about. It's what it's all about. It's about match-ups. You don't know who you're going to play next. You get to that opportunity. The games are not played on paper, and that's what makes it fun for the fans, the fan base, and that's why it's called March Madness. And as a No. 1 seed, we just have to try to prevent any kind of madness going on, but it's going to be a hard task because we know how good all the teams are that will be here in Blacksburg are right now.

Q. As the father of girls, the relationship that your team has with Liz and Raven seems like something really special. Kind of reflect on that a little bit if you would for me.

KENNY BROOKS: First and foremost, yeah, it's genuine. Raven is a big part of our program, always has been. The first time that I met her when she came on a visit, she stole the show. I know it's been well documented how we incorporated her into the whole process. But it was all genuine.

My first year out of college, I worked at Woodrow Wilson



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Rehab Center, and I was able to interact with people with disabilities, all kinds of situations. And it was one of the best years I ever had in my life because everyone that I encountered, regardless of what the outside world thought of them, they were very happy and I think they've just really blessed this world.

For me, I've always been willing and able to just get to learn anyone and everyone, regardless of what their situation is. My daughter, she talked about being a father of daughters, at their high school, Spotswood High School, their coach, Chris Dodson, is a special ed teacher, and they would go to his classes and help interact with all the young people in his classes.

So it's always been something near and dear to my heart, and when Raven came in here, she just captured not only my heart but the whole program's heart.

Getting to know her on a personal basis, and to this day, she probably will text me maybe two or three times a week. And the texts are so innocent and it can be about fidget spinners or what she's doing that day, and it always puts a big smile on my face.

I think us really just getting to know her, I think it really opened up Liz's thought process and what she wanted, because Raven is obviously Liz's hero. And just watching them interact, it's a thing of beauty, the patience, the sisterhood that they have with that whole situation.

We knew we were in good shape with Liz -- I remember I was in Atlanta, and I was watching Liz play an AAU tournament and it was about 25 coaches on the baseline. And Raven was at the game and she was going to the bathroom, and I remember she ran past all the coaches and she took like two or three steps past me, and she put the brakes on and she backed up and she said, "Hi, Coach Brooks". And she waved at me and she took off, and the other coaches were like, Who was that? And I'm like, yeah, we're in good shape with Liz.

But a special relationship. I love her to death.

We had the autism awareness game a couple years ago, and we gave out sweatshirts and tee shirts and I had Raven sign my sweatshirt, and I got it framed and it's in my office and I've got it hanging up. That's the only jersey hanging in my office. That's how special she is to us.

Q. They say if you build it, they will come. Can you walk me through the emotions on Monday as tickets were flying and eventually sold out in a crazy amount of time?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, it's unbelievable. Monday was a blur. Obviously again, the euphoria of hosting and being a No. 1 seed. And I've been screaming it from the mountain tops since I've been here. We play a really good brand of basketball that's very exciting, it's fun to watch. All we need people to do is come in the gym, experience it, and they'll come back.

Virginia Tech is a special place. The fan base is second to none. They come out and they support so much. We watch it firsthand with our men, and the girls come and they watch, they watch a sellout crowd.

We've been slowly building our crowds, and this year has been phenomenal because Hokie Nation has made a good team a great team. The atmosphere in here is second to none. It's loud. You don't only hear people, you feel them.

When tickets went on sale on Monday, and I think they sold out within an hour, I referenced it to being like we're the Beatles. It was probably a really bad reference because my kids don't know who the Beatles are. I probably should have said Taylor Swift or something and they would have gotten it.

It's just remarkable the way Hokie Nation has come and represented, and they're going to be able to show out for our kids.

That's special to me. As it was stated earlier, I'm a father of three daughters. I've been watching women's basketball for 20-something years. Always championing for the opportunities for them to get what they deserve. Things might not always be equal, but we want them to be fair.

For our kids to be able to experience this, that's going to be an accomplishment in itself for me because I know how hard they work, and they deserve opportunities like this.

I'm going to -- again, like when we celebrated the championship trophy, the biggest moment for me was watching them enjoy it. And a big moment for me tomorrow and hopefully if we're fortunate enough to get past tomorrow and then Sunday will be to watch them experience something so special.

Q. When you look back on this group, I know there's still work to be done, but there's banners hanging in Cassell, things from this team. What do you want people to remember or take away from this group?

KENNY BROOKS: I just don't want you to take them for granted. Elizabeth Kitley -- we've never had an All-American. She's a two-time All-American. Sometimes you can -- you don't get bored with it, but you just expect

her to get her ho-hum 20 and 10. You want everyone to realize it.

Georgia Amoore is going to be one of the best players to ever play here. Don't take it for granted, watch it, embrace it, celebrate it. She was named honorable mention All-American the other day. It's kind of ironic for an Aussie.

But they're special, and it doesn't stop there. Kayana Traylor is probably one of the most unselfish players I've ever encountered, who gave up an opportunity to be an all Big Ten performer to come in here just to win. And we won a championship, and she gave me a big hug, and she said, this is why I came here.

Taylor Soule who was all-ACC at Boston College sacrifices enough to come here, elevate her game. And watch her tears of joy after we win a championship, that's what it's all about.

Hokie Nation is blessed to be able to represented by these young ladies, and not only on the court, but in the classroom, in the community, and they represent extremely well.

They're going to be banners that are going to be hung. There's going to be a legacy that's going to be left. But I think the biggest thing is we have tremendous young ladies representing our program.

Q. Kenny, when Shawn was here, I know it's probably -- he did so much for you guys, but what specifically was his impact on your program? And to now be coaching against him in his first NCAA Tournament, what is that going to mean to you and how have you kind of embraced that?

KENNY BROOKS: Shawn wore many hats here, which was great for me. If I needed him to be good cop, he was good cop. If I needed him to be bad cop, he was bad cop, which allowed me to be good cop.

Later on in his career, I gave him more and more responsibilities that was going to help prepare him for his next opportunity. And that's how much I relied on him, but it's how much I trusted him. He has a great basketball mind. Our minds really worked together extremely well, and he was just loyal, extremely loyal. Loyal to the vision, loyal to the way that we were going to get it done, so much so that I know he believed in it so much that I see him duplicating it the same thing at a different level with Chattanooga.

But I don't think we would have gotten to this point without his loyalty and his dedication, his ability to just really dive in

and make us better.

I'll always be appreciative, as I know he will, for the things that I did for him. But true friend. He's a big part of our success as we continue on, because he's done a tremendous job for us.

Q. Kenny, to follow up with something you said earlier here, you said -- you talked about wanting to prevent the madness as you got the March Madness behind you. What was kind of your message to your team about that, because obviously you are a 1 seed, people expect you to get past this weekend, but there are three other teams here?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, and three very good basketball teams, and we know that. We understand that.

They haven't gotten caught up in the brackets or who's here or who do you play next, what do you do here and there. They understand that it's one game at a time.

We've been in this mode probably for about a month and a half. Just worry about the next game but also worried about ourselves. We put ourselves in position that we're good enough that if we take care of what we're supposed to do and we handle things the way we're supposed to do it, we give ourselves a tremendous chance to win.

We don't need a lot of help from the outside. We don't need somebody to have a bad game. We can kind of dictate what's going to go on.

That's been the beauty of where we are, and that kind of comes with the expectation. Instead of hoping to win, we expect to win. If we know we go out and take care of what we're supposed to take care of, we give ourselves a chance to win.

This is why we're playing right now. This is why the excitement, this is why the juices are flowing, because anything can happen. They're going to watch TV and soon enough they're going to be upsets all over the place, and that's why we play the games.

But they're fortunate, they're happy to be a part of it, and they understand that they have an opportunity to build on their legacy. But they also have an understanding that they don't come to play, well, stranger things have happened.

But this group is really locked in, they're focused. I've mentioned it several times. I've never had a group this connected. And it's because, as we talked about earlier, they're all old. I'm looking at them and their bones are

creasing. Some of them are 23 years old. That just doesn't happen.

COVID made it possible, but sooner or later, things will go back to normal where you'll have younger kids. But we have older kids now, and they understand the assignment.

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