Virginia Tech Women's Basketball
Head Coach Kenny Brooks Q&A Highlights
Pitt Game Press Conference
Jan. 9, 2020

Opening statement:
"I think that our goals are so high with this group that we feel like this is an opportunity to have something that could be very special. You have to understand that you have to come out every night in this league, which has been proven because Florida State lost at home and NC State lost on the road. These are the type of games that you have to have because you can't have blemishes on your record. We try to stress that to the kids and this is a very eager group. They want to learn and I can guarantee that more than half of them will go straight home and watch this game on their iPads because they want to get better. They will come to the film session having already seen it and they want to get better. They will text me asking what they should be doing in certain spots and when you have a group that eager and wants to learn eventually, you have to start translating it and applying all your lessons learned to the court. We are very fortunate and excited to come away with a win against a very scrappy Pitt team. Lance White does a tremendous job and I look at him and I feel like an elder statesman in the league because I've been there trying to put together a group of kids who are going to implement your style, system and what you want done. He has done a really good job and those kids have played really hard. They're unorthodox and they took us out of rhythm a few times. Very fortunate to come away with a win. I'm happy, we have to move on, but we have to be better."

On what the two grad transfers Taja Cole and Lydia Rivers have meant to the team:
"They meant a lot. They really steady us a lot and Cole was terrific tonight in getting the ball where it needs to get to. I don't think Rivers anticipated the role that she has, but we knew she was going to come over here - she is a smart kid and a smart player, very gritty, she offers that grit to us where it's desperately needed. With [Regan] Magarity, we lost someone who was like the quarterback back there and really anchored the defense. Rivers stepped into that role and that's why we inserted her into the starting lineup so that she could see things differently and help out in situations. She was tremendous in that and I think she had 13 rebounds. They have been great for us and we knew they would be impactful immediately and that's why you want to bring in a grad transfer."

On how Virginia Tech handled Pitt's pressure:
"I think we handled their pressure well except for when we lost focus. They didn't do anything that we didn't think they were going to do. We knew they were going to shoot gaps and they shot the gaps just like we showed the kids. They really swarmed the basketball and attacked the boards. They did everything we knew they were going to do. I thought we handled the pressure for the most part other than a couple of possessions where we lost focus. We went up 18 points with a couple of minutes left in the first half and we gave them an uncontested 3-point shot and they cut it to 15. We had one of those play where we call it a pick-six where we threw a lazy pass and they got it went down the court and scored an easy basket. All of a sudden, it was a 13-point game. Then they came out like gangbusters in the third quarter. We

have to eliminate situations like that where we lost a little bit of focus. I didn't think [Aisha] Sheppard was as focused and locked in as she normally has been. I though Dara [Mabrey] let her shot dictate a lot of other things and she was trying to fix her shot in her mind when she should have been playing defense. We have to be able to trust our freshman a little more in games like that. We are fortunate to win it and we have a lot to learn from it. We definitely had stretches where improvement is needed."

On Taja Cole's focus and her scoring in the game:
"She was [focused]. That's the first thing I said, 'I don't care what the stat sheet says, my eyeballs say thank gosh for Taja Cole.' She did, she carried us. When we needed a big basket, she got it. When we needed to be steady, she did it. But we can't just rely upon Taja in this league to win the games that we want to win. Everyone has to step up and be able to do their part whether things are going great or not. That's just kind of the maturation process for Dara, for Aisha Sheppard because they haven't been in this role. They've been in complimentary roles their whole careers and all of a sudden now when you're the focal points, when you are someone that people are looking to – whether things are going good or bad, you still need to be even keeled so that we can know that we can trust you and trust that you're there. This is a good learning situation for both of them [Mabrey and Sheppard]."

On the depth of the squad and being comfortable with the rotation:
"Tonight, it wasn't what Cayla King did, it wasn't what Taylor Geiman did, it was just more the feel of our team. I need to go ahead and be able to trust that those kids are going to be able to add to the situation. What I don't want to do is when Pitt is going on a run and things are kind of dicey a little bit I don't want to throw them to the wolves and they are playing very tentative and not getting comfortable. We have to learn to lean on them because they are definitely worthy of playing and getting good quality minutes and then they're going to grow. So, that's one of my regrets that I didn't get both of those kids more minutes tonight, especially with the circumstances of the game."

On Pitt making adjustments in the third quarter to get back in the game:
"I'm not going to discredit what they did and how they came back, I thought we lost focus. They started the half off with a standstill three, which we told the kids that's what that young lady does. She will shoot a standstill three right in front of your face. We were very stagnant on the offensive end, we didn't get scores and they got two quick buckets after that. One of them was a lazy pass again. They shot the gap and got a pick-six and scored it and it kind of snowballed. They had a little bit more energy in the beginning and it snowballed to their success. That's what they do though. I've seen them down 17 to Notre Dame, I've seen them down to a lot of people and they end up coming back because they just really start going after you."

On forcing 17 turnovers in the game:
"Well, I wouldn't say we forced 17, I'd say we forced about nine of them and they probably had eight on their own. Case in point, I think we were up six to end the third quarter and we took an ill-advised. Trinity took a shot with about 10 seconds to go on the shot clock and game clock and they got a leak out fast break and just overthrew it. They overthrew it which could've been

a layup if they connected on it. It was a turnover, we get the basketball and Taja hits a fadeaway jump shot. That's a four-point swing because of that. I wouldn't say that we necessarily caused 17 turnovers, I think they had 17 turnovers, but we had a lot of miscues on the defensive end that we can correct."

On registering consecutive ACC home wins:
"Honestly the back-to-back wins, they're great but a lot of it has to do with how they schedule. Nothing against North Carolina or Pitt but sometimes as long as you're not playing Louisville or someone like that [you can get wins]. But it is good. For me to sit here are say, the remnants of last year doesn't cross your mind at some point sometime, it has. When we started off 0-7 that's probably the worst feeling I've ever had as a coach and especially the way the games went and they were so close. That's probably why as a coach you sit over there and can't relax. When I watch basketball and I see someone with a 12-point lead with two, three minutes to go, I'm, thinking game's over. When I'm coaching, every scenario goes through my head what can go wrong and you try to guard against that. It is really good for our kids, our program to be able to get a couple wins in a row, it's good for the fans because they went through that with us last year."