

Atlantic Coast Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 4, 2023

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

Virginia Tech Hokies

Coach Kenny Brooks

Liz Kitley

Cayla King

Postgame Press Conference



Virginia Tech 58, Duke 37

KENNY BROOKS: Very proud of our kids. Obviously a little bit of adversity in the beginning, unorthodox start, to say the least. We've been there, done that. When we were at Tennessee, playing in the game, shot clock went out, we had like a 15-minute delay, had to keep our composure, so this kind of prepared us for that.

But I was very proud of the kids. Duke is a very good basketball team, one of the best defensive teams in the country. They make you play on your heels a lot, but ever since our loss to them in Durham, we've played a different style. We've been physical on both ends of the floor, running through our passes, getting to our spots. Tonight was no different. We knew we had to be that way. Very proud of them.

It wasn't pretty all the time, but I think that's the way they make the game. But we had some really good performances and a very balanced attack. But I thought Georgia hit some big shots for us making six three-pointers to really put us over the edge.

Not done yet. Very happy to be in the championship game, but our goal is to win a championship, so excited to get back and prepare for what's to come tomorrow.

Q. You are in the title game for the first time in school history. For any of you, what does it mean to have reached this point because I'm sure that was a goal for you guys before the season.

LIZ KITLEY: It's really cool, when I first got to Tech, Coach Brooks talked about this a lot, but we were hoping to win.

We needed stuff to go our way to get this far, but it's really nice to be at the point where we expect to win these games, and we're really looking forward to tomorrow. And we've played them before, we're familiar with each other. It's the third game for both teams, so it's really just going to be whoever pushes the hardest. But we want this really bad, so we're all really excited for it.

CAYLA KING: I think it's just fun to see what this team can do. We continued to break multiple records in the regular season, so now it's time to see what we can do postseason, and I think this team has potential to do some damage in the postseason.

Q. The last time you played Louisville in Cassell this year, you won by two, and Hailey Van Lith went off for 29 points. What's your plan to slow her down tomorrow?

KENNY BROOKS: I mean, obviously slow her down is exactly right. I don't think you can go out and expect to shut Hailey Van Lith down. Tremendous competitor, playing very well as of late. I didn't really see a lot today of their game, but I know she played exceptionally well against Wake Forest.

But they're not just a one-person team. Jeff has got them playing really well at the right time. They were picked to win it. They were picked to win it. They were preseason No. 1, and they're starting to play that way. We're going to have our hands full, not just with Hailey, but the whole group and the way they play. It's kind of unfortunate for us -- it's kind of fortunate but unfortunate at the same time that we've played three teams with very similar styles and they're going to pressure you a lot. Hopefully we have enough in the tank to be able to sustain it.

Q. For the players, I know that, like you said, this is the biggest stage now. A lot of people are just watching Virginia Tech basketball now for the first time and kind of seeing you on the national stage even though you've been doing this for years. What made you want to come to this program and help build it to this prominence? What drew you to that? Obviously being from here, there's some options.



CAYLA KING: This man right here. I really credit him. Being from North Carolina, I definitely did think I would have stayed in state because there's so many great schools here. But honestly, as soon as I went on a couple visits there, there was just a connection, and it felt like a family environment. That's where I wanted to go and where I ended up. I've had a great time here.

LIZ KITLEY: Yeah, same thing. Coach Brooks. I just knew that he would make me the best that I could be, and I definitely think it's coming true. We have a relationship where we're helping each other because we're building this program together, and it's really cool to see where we've taken it.

Q. Cayla and Liz, Kenny has mentioned before that nothing Georgia does really surprises him anymore. I'm sure it doesn't surprise you guys, either. When she's in the type of groove like she was tonight, what kind of added dimension does that bring to your team?

CAYLA KING: I don't know, it's almost like get Georgia the ball. When she's feeling it, she just has a different look on her face. I feel like every time the ball leaves her hands, it's going in the goal, and I think everyone on the team has that same feeling.

Q. Coach Brooks, you mentioned yesterday that you were going to throw some wrinkles into the offense. We saw those wrinkles. I was wondering what the prep process was. Is that something you can install in the shootaround or has that been building up for some time?

KENNY BROOKS: This is the smartest team I've ever had ever. And these two sitting beside me are way smarter than I am. And I can ask them about something, and they tell what we did two years ago. And I can't remember what I had for lunch two days ago.

But they are very smart. We're able to make adjustments on the fly. We threw in a couple wrinkles today before we went out to the game, and then we added a couple wrinkles during the game. And you give Elizabeth a lot of credit because even on a day where it looks like she didn't really have it going, she commands so much attention.

And we ran a couple plays -- I don't know if you remember the second half, and I don't know if it was late third quarter and Georgia hit two straight three-pointers. That was a wrinkle, and we knew they were playing so hard and trying to force Liz off of her spot that we just told Georgia instead of setting a back screen, pop out and you'll be wide open, and she hit two threes right there.

Then I think a play or two later, they were still worried about Liz. They were worried about that play, and instead of running it, KT -- Kayana Traylor -- just ripped it and got a lay-up. So it's a lot of fun with them because you can make adjustments on the fly. You can talk about things. They offer suggestions. I'm talking to them. Georgia comes to the sideline, I'm like, what do you see, what do you feel? Talking to them about the coverages that they want.

They give us those possibilities. And especially during this time of the year when everyone is so familiar with each other, it pays dividends for you.

Q. To follow up on that point, the chess match of moving Liz around to different spots on the floor, given the tempo of the game, what made that dynamic different than games in the past against Duke?

KENNY BROOKS: Well, it's kind of been -- the one common denominator has been that they've been focused on her and trying to be physical with her. The first game it took us a little bit because we hadn't seen them play like that. Second game, we moved her around and she got opportunities. Today she was more like a decoy. Not too many superstars are okay with being a decoy, and she moved around and they were physical with her. And she was commanding the basketball, it just wasn't there, but it opened up so many different things.

Kara does a hell of a job preparing her team, getting them ready, and so we like to think that we do the same, and we were able to capitalize on some opportunities today.

Q. Liz, it almost seems with every great player that just having them on the floor opens up opportunities for all other four players on the floor on the offensive end. Is that something you kind of keep in mind when you're playing on offense?

LIZ KITLEY: I mean, I think definitely that's why I think throughout the game I wasn't like able to get the ball or necessarily get to my spots as much. But I knew that that was allowing driving lanes to be open, and for that reason, I wouldn't stop posting up. I kept trying to get the ball, even if it was a futile effort. Like if Kayana Traylor is able to rip by on the baseline because they're top side, then I'll take that all day long.

Q. Kenny, you were talking about the wrinkles you threw in, being able to take advantage of Duke's defensive scheme. In the second and third quarters when Duke was really having problems with execution, you could tell the players on the court were yelling at

each other, Kara was yelling at them. Was there for you like a moment or a time period when you looked at how they were operating with execution and how you were operating with execution --

KENNY BROOKS: No, I'm not a good enough coach to try to figure out somebody else's -- what they're going to try to do. We kind of go off of what we see. Again, we've been able to do a lot of different things with this particular group because in a day and age where there's a lot of movement in women's basketball and in college athletics in general, these kids right here are my foundation. They're my foundation. From the day that I recruited them and they came here, we had a vision of something like this, and they fought through.

And when you have kids like this and you throw Georgia in there and they know your system as well as you do, you're able to make adjustments on the fly.

Even the new kids who sometimes they might not know something that we've run a long time, I can see them out there giving instructions, hey, you do this, you do that, and when you have that ability, it makes you pretty special.

Q. Kenny, second straight day you held your opponent to under 30 percent field goal shooting. What did you like about your defense today?

KENNY BROOKS: Our defense was good. I know a lot of people talk about a lot of other people's defense, but our defense was pretty good, too. We just happened to focus on the offensive end, too. We're pretty balanced. I thought our kids did a really good job of understanding the scout.

It was fortunate for us that we had some familiarity with them. I think we played them two weeks ago. We kind of knew the physicality level, what it was going to be like, so we were able to make adjustments. It's probably the quickest scout that we've ever had. We kind of went through it, and it was like speed dating. It was like, okay, you got that play, okay, let's go to the next one.

They did a really good job. They learned to, okay, we know what they're going to run, but we also are playing defense. I liked everything about it.

We got a little bit tired at the end, and then part my fault, taking the air out of the ball towards the end trying to get them some rest while they were still out on the floor. But our defensive effort the last two days has been really, really good.

Q. Question for the players: The 19-0 run at the end of the first half that broke the game open, give us a

player's perspective of what it's like to be on the floor during a decisive run like that. What were you seeing? What made it so easy for you guys to execute so well?

LIZ KITLEY: I think I speak for all of us when I say we're oblivious to the score throughout the game. We're in the zone the whole time, so possession by possession we don't really know exactly if we're up by however much. But I think we can definitely feel that we had momentum and we were trying to translate that from defense to offense.

But yeah, I don't think any of us are ever aware of by how much.

Q. Coach, you keep a pretty tight rotation and keep your starters out a lot, even when the game -- late in games when you've got a big lead. What are your thoughts on that kind of strategy? Do you just believe in keeping your best players out there at all times?

KENNY BROOKS: Well, what game are you talking about?

Q. Today and yesterday.

KENNY BROOKS: It worked.

Q. Yeah, it did.

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah.

Q. Liz, you mentioned you really, really want to win tomorrow. For both of you guys, to play in an ACC championship in this place, what is it going to mean to you guys?

CAYLA KING: I think it's just -- no matter the location, it's just what we're doing for our school and our teammates. It's a championship game, but it's also just the next game. So it's definitely the most important.

We've prepared for this all season, so it's 40 minutes, so we've just got to give it our all.

LIZ KITLEY: Just like Cayla said, it's cool to be in Greensboro and everything. But when we're on the floor, I promise you we're not thinking about that at all. We just want to win the game, and it's 40 minutes tomorrow, and we're going to try our best.

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