

# Southeastern Conference Women's Basketball TipOff Media Days

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Birmingham, Alabama, USA

**Kentucky Wildcats**

**Coach Kenny Brooks**

Women's Media Day Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We welcome Kenny Brooks from the University of Kentucky.

KENNY BROOKS: Good morning. It's an honor to be here. Very, very excited for the possibilities that face us at the University of Kentucky, the SEC, and college athletics in general.

It's a great time for me to look at an opportunity such as this. They don't come very often. When Mitch called me a few months ago, it was a no-brainer. It was a great opportunity. I looked at it.

When you think about Kentucky, to me growing up, being a big fan of Tubby Smith, Rick Pitino, you always saw Kentucky basketball.

My team in Kentucky for the last six months, seven months, has not been disappointing. Big Blue Nation is passionate about their basketball there. The fan base is incredible. It's very hard for me to go anywhere without having to talk about basketball. I can go to Target, Historic Memorial Coliseum, Rupp, I can go anywhere in Kentucky and people want to talk about basketball.

We're excited to join this wonderful conference. We understand the challenges that lie ahead with the addition of two new programs, powerhouses.

It solidifies the fact that it is the absolute best conference in the country. We are looking forward to contributing to it. We want to make sure we do our part. The last six or seven months has been great, a testament to my staff. They worked really hard to get indoctrinated into Kentucky history, Kentucky traditions, basketball, the University of Kentucky.

I think we really assembled a group that I'm excited about. How good will we be right away remains to be seen. What

I do know is we're going to be able to come out, play a good brand of basketball, we're going to fight, play well.

Our goal right now is to try to get better each and every day. It's really helped that when you have your quarterback that follows you with you, Georgia Amoore, she and I have been joined at the hip for the last four and a half years. The fact she wanted to follow me to the University of Kentucky, it's a blessing. Now I have another coach, someone who can really talk to the other student-athletes.

With the exception of Georgia and Clara Strack, no one else has ever played for me. Those two are doing a tremendous job of just really helping coach up the other players. As a result, we've had a really good couple weeks of practice. By no means are we where we want to be. We have a great group of young people that are working extremely hard to represent us.

We're looking forward to the challenges that lie ahead. As I said before, our goal is to try to contribute, continue to get better every day. If we can continue to do that, I think good things will happen for us.

But we're excited to be a part of this whole situation with the SEC as we move forward. Just happy to be here. It's been a dream come true. Big Blue Madness the other night, walked out in front of 24,000, I don't think I've ever been in front of a crowd that big. Crazy for one team. That was very much a blessing.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take your questions.

**Q. You brought Dazia here today. Can you speak to how you've seen her fit into your system and how you'll lean on her in the wake of the injuries?**

KENNY BROOKS: Dazia Lawrence, we knew she was going to be special to us, obviously, with her experience playing in different conferences, the University of Charlotte, North Carolina Charlotte. She hasn't disappointed.

Her leadership, her experience has been very valuable to us. If anything, we've had to tell her to be a little bit more

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aggressive because she fits exactly what we needed in that spot. Especially with the injuries that we've had. She's willing to step up. She's becoming more and more comfortable in her role as a leader on a team that she didn't know.

I'm very excited about her productivity. Her and Georgia combined, it has to be -- please somebody check, double-check, they have to be the oldest backcourt in the country. Both of them are 23 years old. That's going to benefit us very well, especially in a conference like this where there's so many talented players. They'll be able to be our calm within a storm.

Dazia has done a tremendous job for us. I'm very proud of her.

**Q. Talk a lot about your time at Virginia Tech, got your coaching start at James Madison. What are the philosophies that you started with, and do you still use any of those today? Were there things you quickly had to change? Curious about your overall philosophy at James Madison compared to now.**

KENNY BROOKS: One of the things that's followed us from school to school with my staff is family. You want to make sure not only within your team, your coaching staff, everything about it has been about family. I've been fortunate enough to have my daughters around, my whole family around the program. It just really created a sense of family.

I learned that from my head coach, Lefty Driesell. He taught me that it's okay to incorporate family with your program. As a result, there's a closeness. A different kind of closeness. Everyone understands you're not just a basketball player, a number, a position, you're people, you're family. When people have tough times, they can definitely come and lean on us for other things than just basketball. That's really helped in our philosophy. It's really helped in how our kids play, how they feel out on the court. It's something that we had at James Madison.

Obviously the style is going to play. When I was at James Madison, we were in the CAA, and it was a big jump to go to the ACC. It'll be another jump to come to the SEC.

You have to evolve. The one common denominator with all of my programs was culture and a family-type atmosphere.

**Q. What has been the theme that's helped you be successful at the different programs? Do you like to have a true point guard? Can you have one, or do you like both to handle the ball?**

KENNY BROOKS: Obviously the key is you get good players. I always have a saying: if you want to make some chicken salad, you better get some good chicken.

At James Madison I think we had six Players of the Year. Virginia Tech, Elizabeth Kitley, a three-time ACC Player of the Year.

I think the common denominator outside of the culture is player development. We haven't been fortunate enough where we can get an abundance of McDonald's All-Americans. We get some players who are willing to work hard, who have a high ceiling, want to push through and continuously get better every day.

Georgia is a prime example. She came to us, to Virginia Tech, her only other Division I offer was University of Portland. We saw something in her.

What I didn't know was how hard she would work. When she got to Virginia Tech, she's a tireless worker, whether it's on the court, in film sessions. That's how she's made herself into an All-American. With just that type of attitude, it becomes infectious, it trickles down to the rest of the team, everyone wants to get better.

Development will always be the cornerstone of what we do. It's what I love to do. If I weren't coaching basketball, I'd probably be training kids because I love watching kids get better each and every year, each and every day. That's our style. That's what we really look forward to.

You evolve. When I was at James Madison, we never had a dominant center. It's always guards who were the better players. Virginia Tech, we were fortunate enough to have Elizabeth Kitley, three-time All-American, so we're going to throw the ball inside.

We kind of evolve to what our situation is. This year I think it will be a little bit more balanced. We have some good guards and some good young post players.

**Q. Talk about your Big Blue Madness intro, where did that come from? Went viral. How is the excitement surrounding Kentucky basketball with Pope's addition as well, you guys feeding off one another, the excitement surrounding the entire brand of Kentucky basketball?**

KENNY BROOKS: First and foremost, when I got to Kentucky, Calipari was there. Cal stayed for a week. I told everybody that the talent wasn't big enough for the both of us, so I ran him out (smiling).



Coach Pope comes in. An infusion of energy in itself. That's what he is. We've been kind of feeding off each other with that. Around town I think it's really caused a lot of excitement around the university. Just Kentucky in general. Not that it needed any more, because Kentucky, they're fanatics.

It's been a blessing to be able to be a part of it, the excitement, what it is. A little pressure because you want to make sure you do your part. But you want those type of situations.

Then Big Blue Madness, I've seen it on TV, but to experience it was totally different. The floor was unbelievable. Kudos to our marketing department going out and making that happen. I need to talk to Mitch to make it full-time in Memorial. That would be sweet. It was a lot of fun.

As far as the intro, it did go viral. The outfit, I didn't pick it out, but it was daughter-approved. I was like I'm just picking up stuff, and I'm like, This okay?

They were like, That's fire.

I guess that was okay. It worked out pretty well. A lot of people are trying to ask me where we got that from. It wasn't a whole lot of thought that went into it. Just people around me made it happen, made it special.

**Q. You mentioned the influence of Coach Driesell on you from the family aspect of a program. What about on the floor? For people who haven't seen your teams play, what should we look forward to seeing in terms of playing style this year?**

KENNY BROOKS: I think a lot of times people will say the team will take on the personality of their head coach. I wasn't that good, but always played hard. That's the one thing that I always expect from my teams. You're not always going to play perfect, not always going to execute the right way, but one thing you can always control is your energy, effort and attitude.

If you go out and play hard because -- you know, how you do anything is how you'll do everything. We make sure our kids understand that, from going to class, being on time, being respectful. All that stuff carries over to your team.

That's something I learned from Coach Driesell. He was a tremendous mentor to me. I didn't even know it at the time. I thought everything he was doing he was doing it to me, but he was actually doing it for me. I find myself saying a lot of the same things he said, treating my players the same way he treated us. True mentor.

If you look at Coach Driesell-coached teams, and if you blink and look back at our teams, there's a lot of similarities in terms of how they operate and what the expectations are.

**Q. I wanted to ask you, you have several international players on this team. Looks like you and Coach Rad, that is something that's intentional. Will that continue in your recruiting?**

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, it's something that has worked very well for us. You mentioned Coach Rad does a tremendous job of understanding the FIBA, the ins-and-outs of that. There's a lot of talented players all across the country.

I think with the boom in women's popularity in the last few years, it's making it more and more attractive for international players to come over. There's also opportunities they get to play at such a high level.

It's worked extremely well for us at the Virginia Tech level. Obviously Georgia was someone we had. We had a kid, Matilda Ekh, last year who was a tremendous player. It really fits our system. We have a number this year. They fit our system, the way we play.

The way we play is similar to international basketball. They come in and fit in very seamlessly. We won't go totally to it, but it will be a good mixture. It's something that we definitely scour the world to see if there are great players that will fit our system. If it is, we definitely welcome it.

**Q. As a coach who consistently sends players to the WNBA, your thoughts on this season with the rise in popularity, ratings, historic growth, but the rise in racism, online abuse directed at players, what are your thoughts on where the league is right now and where it goes from here?**

KENNY BROOKS: I'm a big fan of the WNBA. I think it's growing the way that it should. There have been so many great players that haven't had the opportunity to play in the WNBA because there were limited spots. Now with the growth of women's basketball, the expansion with the WNBA, I think it's continuing to be seen.

I think we're in a very unique situation with it. It almost mirrors back -- I'll date myself -- of when Larry Bird and Magic Johnson came out. With the rivalries that they had, been comparisons with Caitlin and Angel scenarios.

It's something that if we as women's basketball people can



embrace it and market it the right way, I think the boom can happen like it did back in the days.

We market that situation, the brand of basketball is continuing to get great. The games are unbelievable. The New York Liberty and Lynx game the other night had me on my seat. You're watching it, and it's pure entertainment.

I think we have a responsibility not only as women's basketball, WNBA coaches, but college coaches, to continue that growth. We can do that by the entertainment value. If we go out there now -- because you have eyes on the game that really haven't been on the game. There is entertainment value to it.

If we put out a product that will make people want to continue to come back and watch and watch and watch, it's a golden time to watch it explode.

I'm excited to be a part of it. We want to do our part. But it's also a great thing for our kids to come in. My kids are basketball junkies. They're texting me, Are you watching this game? Did you Napheesa Collier do it? Georgia talks about it all the time.

Now they're becoming fans where five, six, seven, ten years ago, kids didn't even watch the WNBA. That's no offense, but it wasn't as accessible. Now it's all over the place. They find it. They tell me what channel it's on. The accessibility of it is helping as well.

We as women's basketball coaches have to do our part and if we can continue to do that this is a golden opportunity to watch it boom. I take that very seriously.

We want to put a product out there that is going to bring in the common fan. I want the person that hasn't been to a women's basketball game, they come, and they're like, I'm coming back because that was very enjoyable to watch. I take that responsibility very seriously.

**Q. A few weeks out now from the official debut. In which areas would you still like to see your team improve before November 4th?**

KENNY BROOKS: All of 'em (smiling).

We have a long ways to go. We're tinkering. I think it's well-documented we've had a couple injuries that have had us to change how we're going to play this year. We're very tall, with the exception of Daisha and Georgia. We're going to be long, athletic. We're going to have to try to utilize to our strength.

We got kids that haven't played for me yet. We're really

working on that. We got great leadership. They're looking to get better and better every day. They're hungry. We have a lot.

We're not going to be anywhere as good in the beginning of the season as I think we will be in the middle or the end. We're just going to continue to work hard every day and get better in all aspects.

**Q. Heard you talking about Cassidy Rowe and her blue tears last week. Tyler also came back. She could have gone anywhere else. What was the conversation with her when she was figuring out if she wanted to stay or leave? How do you think she'll impact the team?**

KENNY BROOKS: Obviously this day and age with the freedom of movement that the transfer portal allows, your conversation is always different. But you can kind of sit across from a kid and talk to them about their situation. You can look at their expression to see if they really want to stay or not.

Those two in general, they exude confidence and enjoyment with the University of Kentucky. They definitely wanted to be here. They've been instrumental for us just trying to get us get acclimated to everything surrounding not only just in Memorial Coliseum but in the town of Lexington.

They've been great. They've been working hard. For them, they have to get used to a brand-new system. They've been slowed a little bit. Philosophies are totally different. But they've been working hard every day and looking forward to trying to get better every day.

You've seen that growth with them. I think they're going to be able to contribute in a positive way.

**Q. How many episodes were there of the Andy Griffith show?**

KENNY BROOKS: A lot. I think there were eight seasons. I still watch it. It comes on at 4:00 every day on TV Land if you want to watch it. It's my comfort show. That and Sanford and Son. If I want to relax from the world, it's kind of like my Calgon: just takes me away.

It's my comfort show. I've seen every one of 'em. I can tell you what Barney Fife is going to see before he says it. I take pride in that.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

KENNY BROOKS: Thank you, guys.



