

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, head coach at the University of Kentucky.

KENNY BROOKS: Good afternoon. I did buy a new house this summer. I got smart, I got smart, because I used to think I could swim. My wife used to be a lifeguard. Finally after 27 years of marriage, she told me I didn't know how to swim, that she would teach me if I was willing to listen. I said if you're willing to come in and let me change your jump shot, I'll listen to you about swimming.

Needless to say, I'm a much better swimmer right now thanks to her. I appreciate her efforts and being patient with me.

Excited for year two. Obviously as you go into something that's brand-new like we had to endure last year, there are a lot of unknowns. Coming into the University of Kentucky where there's rich tradition with their basketball programs, you really didn't know what to expect.

But Lexington and the university has been nothing but great to me and my family. It's been a tremendous transition. I thought last year we did a really good job of setting the foundation for where we want to be as a basketball program. That was largely in part due to our leadership with Georgia Amoore, who came with me from Virginia Tech, who had been with me for a very long time.

It was kind of like a cheat code. She's like my little mini me. The things we were trying to do on the floor, she could really take what I was trying to say into the locker room. That's something that's very, very special to any coach, to have that right there with you.

You couple that with Dazia Lawrence, her willingness to adapt to a new role, new surroundings. Together their leadership is really the big reason why we were able to set a foundation, one that I think is going to help us in the



future.

It really helped us last year. We put together a team of 11 new players going into a brand-new league with not really a whole lot of expectations. Our only expectations were that we knew how good we were, how good we could be. The kids did a fantastic job of just really rallying around each other. Even when we hit adversity, no one really put their head down. They just kept working a little bit harder.

What we encountered after that was a fantastic season. We were picked eighth last year. We came in fourth. We were competing the last couple weeks for a top spot in the SEC tournament.

Along the way we had a lot of wonderful performances. As I mentioned, Georgia Amoore, I thought she had the best basketball year of her career coming into this league, which was very, very hard to do because there's so much talent in this league. I thought she left her mark, really helped elevate us.

Clara Strack, very proud of her accomplishments, what she was able to do, because she was an unknown. Unknown to me. I didn't know what she was capable of doing. She came out and averaged about 16 and 10, Defensive Player of the Year as a sophomore. I think she's going to continue to improve on that.

You look at the likes of a Teonni Key, who didn't do a whole lot in her stint at the University of North Carolina, but she came in with a lot of confidence, played extremely well for us, and her confidence is booming this year.

I'm looking forward to what those two are going to be able to accomplish because both of them are 6'5", mobile post players. Gives us an opportunity to do a lot of different things that you normally would see with post players. I'm excited to watch their development.

We have Amelia Hasset, who I thought was underrated last year. She had a really good year. We asked her to do a lot, to guard the best player on the other team, rebound the basketball, come down the other end and make shots. I thought she did a really good job of that, just learning about

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the SEC.

I'm very excited about those three. We call them the triplets, what they're going to be able to accomplish this year after having a year under their belt.

This year the excitement is really in our building. We understand who we are, what we want to accomplish. We've had some key additions. Jordan Obi, who was hurt last year, we felt would have given us an opportunity to compete at a high level. She's back healthy for us. She's going to offer a lot.

We get an All-ACC point guard in Tonie Morgan. When she got to us, I told her very bluntly, Look, I don't want you to fill Georgia Amoore's shoes, I want you to bring your own.

She's done a tremendous job. With what Georgia was able to accomplish, she's okay with me referencing that, she doesn't hang her head, she understands it and only wants to get better.

I'm excited for this year. I think we have a great group. Probably the tallest team I've been able to coach. We're going to try to use that to our strength, to our advantage. I think we have the pieces and the tools to go out here and compete with everybody as long as we build our chemistry. That makes me very, very, very excited.

Appreciate you guys, your support for women's basketball as we continue to grow this game. This is by far the best conference in the country. We are very happy to be a part of it and try to do our part to help it grow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. You mentioned Teonni earlier, how she didn't get too much playing time at North Carolina. What did you see that you wanted to bring her to Kentucky? Did she exceed those expectations last year?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, absolutely. I've known Teonni since she was 11 years old. Recruited her sister Tamari. Got to know her at a very early age. Obviously, unfortunate for her, she did get hurt at the University of North Carolina, lost some confidence. She was actually my first recruit when I got to the University of Kentucky.

We took her around, showed her everywhere on day one, which is kind of funny. We didn't know what we were showing her. We were kind of making stuff up along the way (smiling).

The next morning we were starting breakfast. I asked her

if she had any questions. She said, Yeah, I have a question about this, that. In the middle of it, she said, By the way, I'm committing, I'm coming here.

I thought dang, I'm at the University of Kentucky, recruiting is going to be easy.

That was a wonderful experience for us. When she got to us week one, I was blown away with her athletic ability, her skill set, what she was able to do. From that point on, we just started working on her confidence.

We watched her blossom throughout the year. She'll admit she was a little bit up and down. But her potential was through the roof. We've kind of let her go a little bit this year where she can kind of explore some more, broaden her game a little bit. She's done nothing but accepted that role and blossomed in it.

I think the biggest key for her, what she's going to bring to us, she's our leader, enforcer, she's the one that the girls look to. She really has that demeanor that people are willing to follow her.

I'm excited for the year she's about to have. I think she's extremely underrated because she's so versatile and can do so many things. I think she's going to have a tremendous year for us this year.

Q. You said you're not going to stop till this team wins a championship. What gives you the confidence to make that kind of statement when you've had such a short time at Kentucky? What do you see from this team?

KENNY BROOKS: I did make that statement. That's why I came here. I wanted an opportunity to compete at a very high level. If you can compete at a high level in this league, you'll give yourself a chance to win a national championship.

I think everyone should try to play for that. I don't know if anybody's going to come in and say, I just want to get to the tournament. I've been there. You want to go a step further. I've had a taste of the Final Four. It was wonderful. You want to get back. But this time you want to win it.

I think I would be cheating Kentucky fans if I didn't think that way. If you're not confident enough to say that's what you want to accomplish, then you really are not doing your job.

We have the resources. We have the support, whether it's from our administration or from our fans, our fan base. The



Kentucky brand gives you an opportunity to dream big. We feel like if we continue to work hard, we can work towards a goal, understanding that only one team wins. It's very hard to do. If you're not working towards that goal, if you're too afraid to say it, maybe you're not confident enough to speak it into existence.

Q. What do your transfers bring to this team?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, we went out this year, and a lot of times we kind of relate the portal to speed dating. You get to know kids for a couple weeks, they're making commitments, decisions on where they want to go. You try to put your best foot forward in such a short amount of time to bring people to your program.

Therefore, we want to get the right type players. We're not trying to win a press conference by getting the flashy name. We want to make sure it's the right fit.

We went out, we targeted the three young women that we got in the portal. They fit a need we had. They also fit our philosophy, our culture. I think they're all going to bring something to the table that we desperately needed, which is going to be a depth from our bench.

You look at Josie Gilvin, a Kentucky kid. Grew up just loving the University of Kentucky. I think she's going to bring pride, energy, effort. She's going to bring a swag to us. She's a great defensive player.

Asia Boone, tremendous shooter. If you saw her in Big Blue Madness, she made her first 14 out of 15 three-point shots. That's going to help stretch the defense for us.

You have Tonie Morgan, who I mentioned earlier. I coached against Tonie in the ACC. I knew how hard of a guard she was, her experience, bringing in with this particular group, I think it's going to really help us.

All three of those young women are going to bring something very valuable to us, something we desperately needed. I think that's going to really help us get to a different level.

Q. How much more prepared are you coming into year two coaching at Kentucky, dealing with the SEC?

KENNY BROOKS: A lot more. Obviously we played SEC teams when I was in the ACC, but it was just one-off games. You never really got an understanding of the day to day, week to week, the physicality of a game.

When you go through it, you have to go through it. I remember one coach said, Welcome to the jungle, is what

she referred to the SEC as.

But you go through it. When you go on the road in the SEC, there's physicality. We bring something that's probably a little bit different I think to the SEC. We play a little bit of a different style than most have seen. I think that's worked for us.

In year two we have an expectation, understanding of what's going to happen when you go on the road in the SEC. But we also got a little bit stronger, got a little bit bigger this year.

I think we're going to be able to provide a little bit of physicality that we weren't able to last year. I think you have to have those qualities in order to compete in the SEC because it's a very tough league.

We're excited about what we can bring to it.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you for your time today.

KENNY BROOKS: Thank you.

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