

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

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Kenny Brooks

Press Conference



KENNY BROOKS: First and foremost, thank you guys for coming out. Very exciting time for us, basketball season, fall. You just smell basketball in the air. Appreciate you guys coming out. For me. It's been a heck of a six months. Whirlwind to say the least. But I think the biggest thing is just the welcoming from Big Blue Nation and how everyone has been so interested in what we're doing, welcoming us to Lexington, and just the Big Blue Nation has been awesome.

I'm very proud of what we've done in six months. Put together a roster. In this day and age, freedom of movement, sometimes you've got to start all over, and we went out and we went in the portal, and we didn't want to always just get the best players, we wanted to get the right players, players that could come in and represent this university, our program, help us start something special, and I thought we did a really good job assembling a really good roster.

It's a group of great kids who just work. I don't know how good they are. I don't know how good they're going to be. I do know right now as we speak I am undefeated, so that's a good thing.

But I really am excited about their progress and their potential. They go out and they work hard every day, and what they don't know, they ask questions, and they want to continue to get better.

It's been a really good couple weeks to begin the season. A lot of new faces. I think with the exception of Georgia and Clara Strack, no one knows anything about anyone, but they're working hard to get to that point. The camaraderie is tremendous. They've been working hard. I think we're going to put a product out there that's going to excite Big Blue Nation.

I don't know how good we'll be in the beginning, but I do know that we'll make everyone proud because we're going to work really, really hard, and we're going to progress into something that I think is going to be very special.

Very excited for that. Very excited for the future. It's been a really good couple weeks.

Q. Coming here, you already obviously have tons of high-level women's basketball experience, but what was something that you had to learn when you got here, something that maybe caught you off guard?

KENNY BROOKS: That my disguises don't work when I'm walking around the Summit, when I'm at the mall. Honestly, we had tremendous success as you mentioned at Virginia Tech. Blacksburg was a little bit different. I was able to walk around in obscurity, and I could just do whatever. Here it doesn't matter where I go, no matter where I am. Someone is going to come up and talk about the excitement surrounding just basketball in general at Kentucky.

It's been very welcoming, very welcoming. People will come up to me and they'll just talk about the excitement. They saw one of my kids at PetSmart or Target or somewhere, and just the approachability that we've created with our kids.

We want to continue that. But just the excitement. Big Blue Nation is a little bit different. Everyone wants a piece of it, and they watch it.

It's funny, I come here, and I don't watch a lot of TV, no offense. I'm always watching film. But there's obviously a lot of outlets here because everyone says, I saw you on TV, I saw you this and here. But it's been very welcoming for me.

Q. You've been around great teams. You know what the mentality is, et cetera. You said you weren't sure how good you'd be this year. Where do you see this team in the grand scheme of teams, the talent level? Two, is there anything here structurally that you think can stop you from playing for a Final Four and a National Championship?

KENNY BROOKS: Well, the comparison, you're always wondering because this time of year you keep going against each other, so if your offense is good, your defense must be bad. If your defense is good, your offense must



be bad. There's been a lot of comparison. I've gone back and watched film of previous teams, previous really good teams, and the only thing I do know is I know that the little monster we have at the point guard position is really good. When you have -- like a football, if you have a good quarterback, you have a good chance. We have a really good point guard, we have a chance. Everyone else is just young, young in their experiences, young with their new positions, young with their new expectations.

We have a young lady Clara Strack, who I don't know if anybody saw her last year, she was pretty much a backup to an All-American last year and she didn't get a whole lot of time, but when Liz Kitley went down, she stepped up and I think she averaged 18 and 10 in the NCAA Tournament. I think she's continued on that stretch.

She provides that. I just have to see it consistently.

That's just the understatement. You just don't know how good you're going to be because you're going against each other. As soon as we have some live tape against someone else, then you can start figuring out how you're going to be, but I love the potential. We had a lineup in practice the other day, I've never had this before, I've never seen it before, we had Georgia at the point guard spot and then we had Amelia Hassett at the 2 and she's 6'3½". At the 3 spot we had Teonni Key who's 6'4", at the 4 spot we had Clara Strack who's 6'5", and then we threw Clara Sylva in at the center at 6'7". That's a really tall team for a lot of men's mid-major programs. So for us to be able to put that out there, have that capability, it's a lot of fun.

Then structurally here, Kentucky is Kentucky. That's why I came here, to have an opportunity to be part of a blueblood and to be able to go and compete on a national stage consistently, and that's something that I desire as a competitor.

You always want to beat the best, you want to be the best, and you want to sustain it. I think we have the opportunity to do it here.

Obviously this building with the upgrades has really put us in position to attract high-level recruits, along with a reputation of Kentucky, along with what we've done in the past as a coaching staff. So the sky's the limit for us, and that's something that I wanted. I wanted that opportunity, and I think we can get it here.

Q. You spoke to the idea of gradual improvement over the course of the season, but have you and the team sat down and refined what success might look like or feel like in year one?

KENNY BROOKS: No, we haven't, but I do think that in this day and age where we have instant gratification, I think we all want it fast, even so much so, whether it's Instagram or whether it's the transfer portal or whether just expectations of putting together new teams, my first year at Virginia Tech, you pretty much inherited a group and you had to play with that group for a while because when you got transfers in they had to sit out a year. Now with the transfer portal you can recreate new teams.

I don't even know, Coach Pope, do they have any players that were left over from last year? I'm not sure. None? So there's two in this program. Cassidy Rowe and Saniah Tyler. So the expectation is quicker, success quicker.

But I think when you still -- it's my job to mentor, my responsibility to teach these kids, and there's no shortcuts. So I don't want to put a number on it. I don't want to put a destination on it. I just want them to get better every day.

We do most things organically. We want to make sure -- our leadership is organic leadership. It's not, hey, we're going to put people in groups and get to know each other in five minutes and we're going to develop a leader. It's got to come over the course of a season.

If we can just focus on getting better every day, then I think we have a shot to continue to get better throughout the year, and then we'll just see what happens from that point.

Q. You've been with this group just for a short period of time, but overall what stands out the most to you about them as a whole?

KENNY BROOKS: They're great kids. They're a little bit too introverted for my liking. It's kind of crazy because you don't really want wild, wild people, but out there on the court I want them to be a little bit wilder. But they are great kids. They work very hard, and they're pleasers. Attitudes, they have good attitudes, they work really hard, and they just want to please. They want to please each other. They want to please the coaching staff.

That's something that you can always work with.

When you have that mentality, we can go out, we can try different things. We can try things that are unconventional, and they'll have a good attitude in trying to get to it. But it's been a very pleasant couple weeks, couple months, being with them, and I think it's going to continue to grow.

Q. Kind of a rare situation where your returners have a new coach, new scheme, new building, but they still return that SEC experience. How much are you going to rely on them?



KENNY BROOKS: It's going to be big. Cassidy, I tell the story a lot, when I met with each and every player from last year's team, some of them were already in the portal, and Cassidy, when she started talking about her experiences here, I swore when she started crying it was blue tears, and I'm like, man, this kid had me -- she had me at hello just because she knew how much she loved Kentucky.

We've been pulling off of those experiences because as newcomers, I know what Kentucky is from an outsider, but I'm like, I can't. Why Kentucky. Everybody says, this is Kentucky. I'm asking her why.

She stuttered and stammered a little bit, and that was enough for me. It was just everything. She cried. She talked about it. She's been great here. What she may lack in height or anything else, she makes up for it with her pride of Kentucky.

She's been a big plus for us. She's been great in practice. She's been very communicative. She's talking.

Then Saniah, we call her ST, has had probably the most experience. There's been plenty of times when I've played against SEC teams, but I'm asking her for the longevity part of it, hey, isn't this league this or is this league that. She's been able to share some of her experiences with me, too.

Ironically we actually played against both of them when they were freshmen and we got to play against them. Just to watch their growth and what they've been able to provide for us, it's been really big and important for us.

Q. You said Georgia is a monster. What would that make Silva inside with her size? And talk about what you meant by "a little wilder" on the court, just so we understand that.

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, I think we have such polite kids. One of them will make a tremendous move and they'll get fouled and they've look at the other one and they'll kind of look at them and it's almost like, pardon me, excuse me, when I want them to say, "and one," or just a little bit of a, hey, you can't guard me, in a very nice way. We're never going to show up our opponent, but we want them to know a little bit that we're pretty good.

But they're coming around. They're coming around. We haven't had any drills where we're practicing trash talking yet, but we're just trying to get them to show their personalities a little bit more.

It's been a lot of fun with that.

Then Clara Silva, bless her heart, she had a tremendous summer. She played international basketball, was voted one of the top players in her age group. There's been plenty of websites who said if she was American she probably would have been a top 10 player coming out in a high school class, and then she gets here, she gets here two days before classes start, and she's having to get acclimated to a whole new life.

We had the rain for a few days, and she was like, what is this. In Portugal they don't have that. So she's getting used to not only the style of play, the language, the food, everything, and still go out and compete. So she's been -- the other freshmen have been here all summer.

It's just going to be a work in progress for her because it's just a totally different style. But she's as skilled as any player that I've ever had at that position. She's taller than any player I've ever had at that position. She's one that if we get her talking a little bit of smack, everybody is going to be in a trouble. But she's a joy. She's a joy to have around, and I think Kentucky fans are going to be in for a treat over the next four years being able to cheer for her.

Q. You had a couple injuries last year that set you guys back. Are they available? Are they going to be here?

KENNY BROOKS: No. No. Obviously Jordan Obi, transfer from Penn, she was going to be a really big part of our development, fifth-year senior, big, strong guard, gave us the opportunity to be versatile. We could have played her at the 3, the 4, and she would have been -- we could have played big, we could have played small. She's going to be out probably until January and then there will be a reevaluation of her situation.

Then Dom I think it's been documented she tore her ACL in international play. Too, she would have been a six-foot guard that would have given us experience. She went to the Elite 8 last year and I think she was the sixth man on that team, very productive. She also would have given us the opportunity to play big, play small. Both of them have been very active in practice, whether it's been cheering. We're keeping them involved, and they've both been doing extremely well and rehabbing.

They'll be definitely a big part of our future, which kind of gave us an opportunity as we go into recruiting, we have a cushion because we know those two will have the opportunity to come back next year and strengthen our team, as well.

Q. When it comes to Big Blue Madness, what's your

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

excitement for that? How much are you rely on Saniah and Cassidy to learn what it's about?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, it's kind of sneaking up on me because every day somebody tells me something else I have to do. (Laughter).

I'm no stranger to it. Obviously it's legendary. People have been very excited about it.

I do know that I'm not riding out in a motorcycle. I'm not dropping down from the rafters.

I think they hired me to be a coach, and if they wanted me to be an entertainer they've got the wrong person.

I don't know, 24,000 cheering for you, I might come out of character a little bit and do something. But it's exciting.

Obviously you look across the country, and we have an eye on things because we have recruits that go to other places that try to emulate Big Blue Madness, but I think the way it's done here is legendary.

At Virginia Tech or at James Madison, I saw Big Blue Madness, and that's one that you felt like was one of the best ones, the best one, and anything else is just imitation.

I'm excited to be a part of it. I don't have my fit yet. That's one thing of having a daughter on the team, she is going to be on me because she says she doesn't want to have secondhand embarrassment. (Laughter). She's pretty much going to -- whatever I walk out in, she has to approve it. There's a little bit of pressure there.

Q. What are your expectations for Lexi, and then in Georgia's case she's playing without Kit. What are your expectations for handling that?

KENNY BROOKS: First of all, Lexi has the best name in Big Blue Nation history. I got the blue part when we first got her to commit, and I was like, why is everybody saying it's the best. I get the blue part, but Lexi -- Lexington, I got it. But expectations for her, because of the injuries, it's been a little bit more. We need a little bit more from her.

Any freshman, you want to try to ease them into the situation, but now she's going to be thrust into the situation because she's going to have to step in and produce for us in a way that the other two probably would have, and obviously she's going to make some mistakes, but I think she's had a really good camp so far. She's shooting the ball well. She's learning the intricacies of defense at this level.

But her attitude has been tremendous, so we're going to continue to thrust her into situations and make her feel a little bit uncomfortable so she can become comfortable later on.

But we have all the confidence that she's going to be great for us.

Then Georgia, Georgia's situation, she got a little bit of a taste of it when Kitley went down last year. One of the best games I ever saw her play -- when Kitley got hurt in the UVA game, I'll be honest with you, I was messed up because I knew what she had done before anyone else did. We were still in that game, and I remember being in a fog, and then Georgia just kept us around, kept us around, and she looked at me, and she says, I got this.

She went out and scored 39 points against UVA. We ended up losing the game, but it wasn't because of her efforts.

She was able to just adjust from, hey, I'm the facilitator, to hey, I'll be the lead person.

I think she's had a whole summer. She had a whole summer she got to practice with the Opals, her national team in Australia, so she got good competition there. She went out to the Kelsey Plum camp where she got good opportunities there, and then she went to the Nike academy, so she got a lot of good basketball nationally playing against the best of the best to shift her focus, hey, I have to be the main person.

Now when she comes off of a screen-and-roll instead of really looking for Liz as option one, option two, now she's becoming option one, and then other people are becoming option two.

She's my little mini-me. We're joined at the hip. We watch film like we would watch Netflix, and we just go, and we're on the same page. It's really fun watching her bring up the younger players to get them on that same page that her and Liz were on.

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