

University of Kentucky Basketball Media Conference

Monday, October 6, 2025

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Coach Kenny Brooks

Press Conference



KENNY BROOKS: Thank you guys for being here. Obviously starting year two, I feel a lot more comfortable than starting year one, just understanding what we're about to get into.

Nonetheless, want to try to feed off a really good year for us. I thought we did a really good job of setting a foundation, where we want to go and who we want to be. Last year was terrific. Very proud of the young women who really sacrificed a lot to help us get on this trajectory.

A lot of fun. I think we'll be able to talk a little bit about it at Big Blue Madness. We were talking about breaking records in everything we did last year, and obviously looking forward to this year, and I'm very excited about this group. A lot of unknowns. Just like most coaches around the country at this point of the year, you're just trying to build chemistry, and we're trying to do that.

I think we're on our way. We've been banged up a little bit. But looking forward to having a good week this week with a full complement of players where they can go out and just start to build that chemistry with the talent that we have, so very excited and looking forward to everything that we can accomplish this year.

Q. (On what actor would play him in a movie.)

KENNY BROOKS: If you'd have asked five years ago, I might have said Will Smith, but now -- let's just keep it safe and say Denzel couldn't mess up a movie, so I would say Denzel Washington. He's fantastic. I think I look like him a little bit. (Laughter).

Great question. Great question.

Q. What's been one thing that's been better about this than you thought?

KENNY BROOKS: We expected just the attitude. Obviously building off of last year and a lot of them gained so much confidence in themselves not only on the court but off the court, and they came and they came to campus,

they were ready. They were ready to get to work. Their attitude, the returners' attitude has been very infectious to the newcomers, and hey, this is how we do it. So been very proud of that.

What I didn't expect is they seem taller than I remembered before they left. This is probably the tallest team I've ever had in my 25 years of coaching, and I think we're going to be able to use that to our advantage just because obviously we may not be the quickest team, but last year we led the country in blocked shots, and I think we have the catalyst to still do that again with Teonni Key and Clara Strack in the middle, but they're very tall and they're long, so we're looking forward to using that to our advantage.

Q. Can you speak to what it's been like to build your relationship with Tonie Morgan?

KENNY BROOKS: I think first and foremost, I said it early, I didn't want Tonie to feel like she had to be Georgia, and although we reference Georgia a lot in our conversations just because Tonie and I only have less than a year to build that chemistry, and so the blueprint has been what Georgia provided.

To Tonie's credit, she has been magnificent as far as just understanding it, welcoming it, watching -- we watch film of Georgia, and not just to praise Georgia, but Georgia did it in a way that Tonie wants to learn how to do it as well.

I commend her for just her coming in here, hearing Georgia's name a lot but not letting it affect her and knowing that she's still going to be Tonie, and we're excited for what she's going to be able to bring to us.

She can do some things that Georgia couldn't do, so it's up to me to tap into those resources, and I'm excited for what she's going to be able to do this year.

Q. (On Jordan and Dom returning.)

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, first and foremost, just to see them out on the court, it just warms your heart because you know how hard they worked after being devastated with the injury and not being able to play. So they really poured their energy into getting better and getting back out

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on to the floor.

Jordan has looked really, really good. She's probably close to 100 percent. Dom is still working her way back with confidence and whatnot. It takes a while for that injury to get better. But just having them both on the floor, it was painful for us last year not to have them, but it's also a benefit for them to be able to have watched last year, to understand what the system is, can add some of their expertise to the newcomers, and they've both been beneficial to us, and now they're going to provide depth for us.

Q. Obviously Clara had a great year last year. Where have you challenged her or what is her challenge because she's a good player?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, the beauty is I think she's challenging me. I always tell them if you want to be great, you have to meet me halfway. This kid, she's done everything that I've asked her to do in a short amount of time, and even though we put so much pressure on her, and rightfully so, because she deserves it, she's earned it, but sometimes I have to reel myself in to say, look, she's still 19 years old. She's only supposed to be a sophomore this year, and she's well beyond her years.

What I mean by she challenges me, every day it's like, okay, can we get an extra workout, can we get extra shots, can we do this. I don't ever have to ask her, and she's really compliant in that, because she wants to be great. She's a fierce competitor. She's gotten better, and I think what you guys are going to see this year -- if there are traditionalists out there and they're talking about post players and you want me to put her on the block and let her bang and throw up some two-foot lay-ups, it's not going to happen. She's kind of like a new-age center in the way that the game is evolving where they can do more than just go down on the block.

We've got plays. We've got some opportunities for her to bring the ball up the floor. We've given her the green light, okay, if you get a rebound, hey, let's go; go with it. We're doing things unorthodox where instead of her always setting the ball screen and rolling, she's getting ball screens set for her and she's coming off of it because she's just a dynamic passer. I think she's one of the best passing post players in the country.

Now, what she has to be ready for is that she's not going to sneak up on anyone. She's going to be the focal point of everyone's scouting report, and I think that she's ready for that. She's had a phenomenal summer. She's gotten a lot better. She's shooting the three ball as well as anybody on our team right now. I just think you're going to see her

continue to develop, and to have a 6'5" mobile center who can do a lot of different things, we're going to take advantage of it, and that's going to be our way of being a hard guard.

But very proud of her and what she's been able to accomplish in a short amount of time, and her attitude is infectious. She's becoming one of our leaders on the team, and that's something that I never would have considered maybe a year ago, and that's how far she's grown as a person and as a player.

Q. Kaelyn Carroll, talk about her, what she brings, her size --

KENNY BROOKS: She's a freshman. The best thing about freshmen is she become sophomores. No (chuckling).

KK's situation, she's going to be a dynamic player for us. She just has to go through a process. It's really not fair what we're trying to ask of her right now because she's essentially the only freshman that's in the rotation. So therefore she's playing with a bunch of seniors, people who are really trying to help lead her.

But the one thing that she does do exceptionally well is she shoots the basketball.

She's had a trying preseason just like any freshman would when they're learning, but there's no doubt in my mind by the time we tip it off, she's going to be there in the rotation helping us because she's a great shooter, and she has a great attitude. What she doesn't know, she's trying to pick it up, and she's gotten so much better since the beginning of practice.

We're excited about her and excited about her -- she has an infectious attitude. She wants to work hard. She shoots the ball exceptionally well, and she's going to be a nightmare for other people when we put her in the game because she's going to really stretch the defense.

So I'm excited about her and what she's been able to do, and she's going to be a big part of our success this year.

Q. In talking to Teonni over the summer, she seems so much more confident and a lot of her teammates mention her (indiscernible). How have you seen her come into her own?

KENNY BROOKS: Well, I think probably in the year 2032 or so she's going to run for President of the United States. That's how much she's grown. Her confidence has just blossomed. She walks into a room and she commands the

room. We're down on the floor, Teonni opens her mouth, everyone listens. That's a major step from where she was at this time last year. We were just trying, begging and pleading for her to be her own cheerleader, and now she's really commanding the room, understands what we want, how we want it done. I think she's going to have a tremendous year. I really do. She plays with a lot of confidence.

Again, her versatility, just like with Clara, our forward-center combination has to be one of the better ones in the country just because of their experience, their height, their mobility, what they can provide, and we're looking forward to utilizing it.

But very proud of Teonni. Made the dean's list last year. She's had a tremendous transformation since she's come to the University of Kentucky, and that's what she was looking for when she transferred, and I'm just glad and proud of the way she has prospered, and I'm looking forward to what she can do this year.

Q. Talk about the work Teonni put in this summer and how she's approaching year two.

KENNY BROOKS: She's put in so much work to expand her game, to fine tune her game, to be confident in some of the things that she hasn't done well. Because of that, because of her work ethic, we've kind of given her carte blanche. Just go. Just play. You make a mistake, it's on me. If you make another mistake, it's on the other coach. We want her to just play with confidence because when she does, so many wonderful things can happen.

When she's playing like that, it gives us an opportunity to beat anyone. We want to give her that opportunity to grow because we think that we'll benefit from it. I think she'll benefit from it. No question in my mind that she's going to have a year that's really going to be one that's going to be impacted not just by her play but by her leadership, and that's just as important to us because I half joking said she's going to run for President, but she could, because she's that striking after a personality, and everyone wants to follow her.

Q. (On the depth of the team.)

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, it's very important. I looked through box scores throughout the NCAA Tournament last year, and the teams that really survived at the end were the teams who are deep enough. A lot of teams were only playing seven. We wanted to be one of the teams that not only do you not want to wear your players down throughout the regular season, but you want to have that depth so that you can just have options, choices.

We carefully went through the portal and we wanted to get the right pieces. We did not want to just assemble a group of talent and put them out there and see what happens. We wanted to have pieces, and we did that. We got Asia Boone, who is probably one of the better shooters in the country that can help stretch the defense. Josie Gilvin, she brings an unorthodox style to our philosophy where we kind of guard the paint where she does a really good job of anticipating and playing defense and causing havoc all over the place, and I think that's going to be good for us, too.

Then you talk about KK, the addition of KK, but you look at a lot of our players, we talked about Teonni, we talked about Tonie, we've talked about Jordan, Clara. The one that you guys really need to watch out for is Amelia. Amelia has walked into the room like okay, she busts down the door, like, here I am. She's got the green light. She's shooting the ball exceptionally well. I think she grew an inch over the summer, but she's playing out of her mind.

You get all those options right now, and it gives us a chance to go out there and compete with anyone, and that's all we ask for is an opportunity to compete with anyone. But having that bench is going to give us that chance.

Q. Last year around this time you told us you were worried (indiscernible). Can you tell us how you feel now?

KENNY BROOKS: They feel themselves a little bit now. Teonni, Clara, they command -- they have a presence now, and pretty much the rest of the group follows their lead. Clara, I know she looks like she's quiet, but she's feisty, and then Teonni, I wouldn't call her an instigator, she'll get everybody going and everybody wants to follow suit. We still have some ways to go. They're still learning each other. They're a little timid around each other because they're a little nervous to hold each other accountable, but once they continue with the chemistry part of it and they start holding each other accountable, I think their attitude will become more infectious and they'll have a little bit more of a swagger.

Q. (On his evolution as a head coach).

KENNY BROOKS: You have to evolve. You really do. This is year 24 for me as a head coach, and if my players from James Madison would come watch a practice, she'd be like, who are you. Even my players from my previous spot, they would say, who are you. You have to learn how to evolve to reach young people while still getting your point across. I'm a totally different coach. You really think



about the things that you want to say, how you want to say them to get your point across because it's a different generation.

But still, I think we have an opportunity to be an impact on them, and it's different. The transfer portal changes a lot because sometimes if you're hard on a kid, you're wondering, okay, have they checked out, are they going to go somewhere else because they have easy options to do so. But I just think you need to be true to yourself and knowing that you have the opportunity to impact young people's lives.

I take it as a responsibility because I have to continue what their families started in raising them and still holding values and whatnot, but at the same time, it doesn't always work because you can't give everyone what they want, whatever that situation is. So you have to really do what you think is best for the program, whether it looks right or wrong. I'm invested in it, and I'm going to try to do that.

I think I'm still an effective coach. It's just being done a different way now because you have to evolve. You don't want to be extinct if you don't evolve. You don't want to be a dinosaur. But it is definitely a different day and age in the way that you have to coach and the way that you have to reach young people.

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