

Atlantic Coast Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 8, 2024

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

Virginia Tech Hokies Coach Kenny Brooks Cayla King

Postgame Press Conference

Virginia Tech 55, Miami 47

KENNY BROOKS: Super proud of my kids, the effort, the resiliency that they showed. Obviously as a coach, as a parent, sometimes you want to try to bring the positives out, and I told them I wasn't going to do that today because I could have just said, it wasn't pretty, but I just darned out told them that parts of it was ugly.

But in March, at this time of the year, it's about surviving and advancing. We did that. Because of the resiliency, the way they went out, our kids didn't play great, and we obviously know that we can play better, but they couldn't have played harder. That's something that I really value as a coach.

It's not always going to be perfect, but if you have perfect intent then we can deal with that. Super proud of them.

And Miami is a good basketball team. They're going to be representing the ACC in the NCAA Tournament, so that was a very good win for us, so we'll take it and we'll move on.

Q. You guys really benefitted from the 2-3 zone, especially on the perimeter. What did you like from your defense today?

KENNY BROOKS: I thought we did a really good job of communicating with an understanding of where their shooters were. I thought we did a really good job on Day-Wilson for the most part because she's dangerous and she really can get it going. She's been playing exceptionally well as of late. I thought we did a really good job of communicating.

We talked about rebounding, rebounding the basketball.



We went back and we looked at our last 12 games. We had a 10-game winning streak, and in every one of those games we out-rebounded our opponent.

The two losses that we had right at the end of the year we got out-rebounded, so that was an emphasis.

We won by plus one on the boards, so it makes me look like a genius so they'll listen to me, whatever I say, from here on out.

Q. You got great production out of the 5 spot with Micheaux and Strack. How proud are you of them?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, they did a really good job. Rose has been a professional all year long. Obviously she was out of the rotation for a while, and she came to practice every day with a smile on her face and just continuing to try to work hard and was waiting for her opportunity, and I thought today was that opportunity. I thought she gave us some very good minutes.

Clara -- and I say this affectionately and I love her to death; she's our baby; she's the baby of the group. She just turned 18 maybe a month or two ago -- I really thought I was going to redshirt her this year, but she came out today and she just worked.

She just worked, and she wasn't perfect, man, but I think she showed us glimpses of what she's going to be in the future, and it's very exciting for us because she's very talented. She's not scared of the moment. Sometimes we don't even know if she knows she's in the moment, but we'll take that because it allowed her to be able to produce for us, and I'm very, very proud of her.

Q. Obviously Elizabeth Kitley and Georgia Amoore have been the bulk of the scoring this season. Without Kitley on the court and with Amoore only playing 13 minutes in the first half, how proud were you to see the rest of your squad pull out this gritty win today?

KENNY BROOKS: Very, very proud. Sometimes they get a bad rap because people want to say it's the Kitley and Amoore show, and it is to a certain extent, because when

you have two players of that magnitude you want to be able to utilize them whenever you can.

We've ridden them all the way to a top 10 ranking, an ACC regular season championship. We would have been fools not to do that. But we have other kids who are capable, as well, and today they were able to show it.

They didn't always do it. We can shoot much better than 5 for 26 from the floor, from the three-point line. We had some shots that we probably could have made that we didn't. But I'm just very proud because it's always a team effort. Doesn't matter who scores the points, as long as we win, all of them are very happy, and today is no different.

Q. From the end of the regular season to today in preparation, not knowing if Kitley is going to play, if she's not going to play, in terms of preparation, were you working more on the offensive end or defensive end to get ready for this?

KENNY BROOKS: That's a really good question. I was working on my mental. Obviously Elizabeth is a big staple in what we've done for the last five years. Make no bones about it. Not only on the offensive end. I think it goes a little bit unnoticed that she's on the all-defensive team I think the last three years. We do a lot to funnel offenses to her, and then she will contest it and clean it up.

We didn't have as many days as some people would expect. We were off on Monday. Tuesday we were extremely light because we'd been through a lot the last few weeks. That was our plan leading up into it, and obviously not having Elizabeth in practice, I probably should have changed it so we could get more reps with the younger group and the kids.

But we really had one day of prep, and it was a lot on the offensive end because I wanted to see what we were going to do because if you look at my plays, probably 75 percent of them, 80 involve Liz, and then we play off of that.

We had to figure out what we were going to do, what was going to work. We made up a couple plays. We had a play called summertime today, and it was just like pretend like you're playing summertime basketball and just go hoop.

We ran it like, what, three or four times? It was really just trying to see who was going to work well with who. We knew we were going to try to substitute Clara for Rose, Rose for Clara so that they could stay fresh, and that really kind of worked for us.

Q. Cayla, with about four minutes left, the game was

tight all throughout. You went on that 6-0 run with the Strack lay-up and then your lay-up, and then the Amoore mid-range. How big was that to blow the game open, scoring on those three possessions in a row?

KENNY BROOKS: It was an offensive explosion, wasn't it?

CAYLA KING: Six points, yeah. The points were hard to come by this game, but I think we were just trying to take what they give us. They were clearly putting like two, three people on Georgia, so those six points were really big.

Like he said, that was an explosion in this game. I think it got our fans and our team hyped, so it was a good little run.

Q. There was three freshmen obviously playing great minutes today. Can you speak to what they've done for your team, and is it kind of crazy that sometimes you look on the court and you don't realize who you're really playing, like oh, wow, these are freshmen on the court for a top team?

CAYLA KING: I think it just made us, the older girls, have to talk more. I think they know from watching us what they're supposed to do, but sometimes in the game it can be a lot and overwhelming for them and they know where to go, but the little extra nudge in the right direction, just talking to them, I think they listened really well today.

But they've been there all season. I think like anyone who has a workout, whether it be Georgia, me, Liz, you look over and all four or five of them are watching, even the redshirts, and they just like to learn. I think that's what they've done this year, and they stepped up today, and we need them, and we're going to continue to need them.

KENNY BROOKS: I noticed one time we were in a time-out and I looked and I'm like, damn, I got three of them in at the same time. You look back on it, we only had two players on the floor at any point in time who played in the ACC Tournament last year. And everyone else, they were watching it last year.

I'm very proud of the way that they came out, they stepped up, they knew they had to. We challenged them this week because they needed to be productive for us, but they're going to be good. They really are.

Sometimes it's unfair for freshmen to be thrown into a circumstance like we've thrown them into. It's not like they've had like an opportunity to learn where you're not playing such a high level of basketball with high



expectations.

Our expectations were to continue to win, win the ACC. We did that, the ACC regular season championship, with freshmen involved. We put a lot on them, but they've really come through.

Sometimes they probably think that they're not good because we're pushing them so hard because we know how good we need them to be, but they never stop working, and I'm very proud of them.

Q. Kenny, where do things stand with Liz at this point in terms of this week and even beyond? You talked the other day about hoping for good news. What other details can you share with us at this point?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, first and foremost her health and safety is everything that we're worried about, and no basketball game or games or anything is going to supercede that.

So we're going to make sure. We're taking it slow. Rehab is going well. She's diligently rehabbing.

We made the decision -- she will not play this tournament, regardless of how far we go. No offense, but we really feel like we want to focus and really make that run that we did last year.

So another week is going to be able to do some wonders, not only from a physical standpoint but from an emotional standpoint. She will not play this tournament, the rest of the tournament, and then we will reevaluate when the time is right next week and see where we go.

Q. Coach, Notre Dame tomorrow. What kind of adjustments are you looking to make from your last meeting?

KENNY BROOKS: Bruh, can I just enjoy this one for a second? Notre Dame is playing as well as anyone in the country right now. We experienced it last week, their physicality -- they're a little bit different than they were last year. They're tenacious on the defensive end, obviously with the addition of Hidalgo.

They got off to a great start today. And bless his heart, I'm in my locker room, and I think we're on like a three, four, five second delay in watching the game and what happens, and Jeff Walz gets thrown out. He gets thrown out and two seconds later, boom, my door flies open and it's Jeff Walz.

I did thank him for their comeback and making Notre Dame play harder down the stretch, to be able to do that.

They're playing well. They're playing extremely well. Hidalgo really makes them go. Citron I've said it before is one of my favorite players. She just doesn't get rattled. Westbeld is playing really well right now. They don't play a lot of people, but the people who play are playing well.

We know it's going to be a tough task. We'll get back and we'll figure some things out, and we'll try to see what happens.

Q. I've been with the ACC since the late '70s, and your fan base, the way they travel now, can you speak to your fan base and how oftentimes you feel like you're at home?

KENNY BROOKS: I wish my goosebumps could talk because they would tell a lot, you just saying that. Just the recognition that our fans have given to this program has been remarkable. She's a big part of that. Elizabeth is a big part of that. Georgia is a big part of that. They have a story to tell, and they're telling it, and Hokie Nation is listen, and they're following us.

They have really supported us. I've said it a long time, that Hokie Nation is such a passionate fan base they can make a good team great, and they've done that. For a game at 1:30 on a Friday and they're showing up like it was a championship game, that is wonderful, not only for Hokies, not only for this team, but for women's basketball in general.

We've played in front of so many sold-out crowds. They're not just sold out like it's a promotion or something. These people are loud. They're loud. They get that "let's go Hokies" chant and it's crazy. One of the things that went under the radar, I think we broke our attendance record playing at the University of Virginia, in the Commonwealth or the state of Virginia, whatever it was, but I don't think it was really told, half of those people were Hokies. We really brought some people into that building.

For me as a father of three daughters, as a coach who has just really championed for the cause of people supporting women's basketball, it makes me feel so good for them to be able to play in front of crowds like this because they deserve it. All these young women deserve it because they work, man. They work.

You listen, you listen to a lot of the NBA guys, okay. I listened to a podcast the other day and Kevin Garnett and Paul Pierce were talking about women's basketball and how they can name more women's basketball players than they could men's basketball players.

And that's no slight against men's basketball, but it just goes to show you where women's basketball is going. Now it's up to us. It's up to the rule makers. It's up to the coaches. It's up to the officials. It's up to everybody to jump on this opportunity to continue the rise because the game can be a beautiful game.

We have to continue to make it a beautiful. We have to. We have to change some of the rules. You look at what the NBA did a few years back when it was like a little slugfest, and people stopped watching the NBA.

What did they do? They went in and changed some of the rules, and it became an offensive-minded sport, and now billions and billions of dollars go into TV because people watch it. That's what they want to see.

I think we have to take it upon us as leaders of this game because it's at a very high level right now, and we need to seize the opportunity, seize this opportunity so that women's basketball can be at the top.

We're talking about rivaling the men's game right now, and we need to take advantage of that.

Q. Talk about the Mamba Mentality that Georgia plays with when she's out there. And obviously Kitley being gone is going to be a storyline to be watched, but how much will you -- how comfortable are you to have a player like that who you know can take a game over and hit those clutch buckets when you guys are in those situations and she is always going to be willing to step up to that challenge?

KENNY BROOKS: I've had an embarrassment of riches having both of them be able to do it. Sometimes people would me if you had a last-second shot, which one would you go to, and I just would avoid the question.

Obviously Kitley is not here with us at the moment, but we're very comfortable with Georgia and what she does. The relationship that I have with her, she was in my office two days ago and we were preparing for practice and we were talking about what we need.

I don't think I've ever had a situation where -- you know, I call her my mini-me, and a lot of people say they think it's because of what we do on the court. That kid thinks just like me. Our personality -- would you agree? It's scary. It's scary.

When you have that kind of relationship with a kid, I know what she can do. I know what she's capable of, and I pretty much know what she's going to do in the moment. I'm very fortunate in having that. We have every bit of

confidence that she can take us to where we want to go, and she's shown it.

Even when Liz went down in the UVA game, Georgia just had this look in her eye. I think she had like 39 points. She's capable of doing that, and you watch what she's doing. She is every bit of 5'6" on her tippy toes, and she's got everybody chasing her, two and three people chasing her, and she will still find a way to get somebody a good opportunity.

Q. For both of you, coming into today as the No. 1 seed as well as being the previous ACC champs, can you speak to what kind of pressure that adds to your game and how you guys kind of overcome that pressure?

CAYLA KING: I think we've said it a lot, pressure is a privilege, and with that, we take it serious. We know it's going to be a tough task, but we also know we've earned it and we deserve it. That's how we have to play.

KENNY BROOKS: We're not overconfident at all, but we do celebrate in our successes. You have to realize that -- like when we were going through that winning streak, we won 10 in a row, it got to the point where the kids were like, okay, it's another win. No, celebrate that. Understand it. You're not losing focus.

I want you to know right now at this moment, today is Friday, and we are the reigning ACC Tournament champion and we are the current ACC regular season champion. Embrace that. Embrace it because you've earned it. They've earned every bit of it.

The pressure, the expectations, we've gotten past that. We understand if we come out and play to our capabilities, we can be good.

Q. Cayla, I wonder what this people has been like for you obviously as one of the leaders of this team. I know you and Liz go way back. To see her get hurt, to be coming into this tournament in your hometown, and to have such a young team, how have you stepped up as a leader and embraced that role? And Coach, if you could talk about Cayla's leadership and what she brings to the team, as well.

CAYLA KING: We just talked about how everybody needs to do their part and nothing more. Maybe be a little bit better. Everybody just has to step up some.

Liz is a big part of our team, but we still have a lot of talent. Our freshman group is a really talented group, probably the most talented group we've had since I've been here.

Just letting them know -- just keeping that in the back of their heads, like you guys are talented, you can do this, and we've seen them do it. Just keep watching us, keep listening, and everybody just step up a little bit.

KENNY BROOKS: For us, unfortunately, injuries are a part of sport, and they've been a part of this. The last four ACC tournaments that we've been a part of, our leading scorer Aisha Shepard, right before the ACC tournament she sprained her ankle really bad, and we played two games using her as a decoy. We were never able to finish it.

The very next year Cayla sprained her ankle in the quarterfinals and wasn't able to play again until the NCAA tournament. The very next game of that same year Liz hurt her shoulder and was out for the tournament, and we had to pray to get her back before the NCAA tournament.

Last year we were healthy. We won it. This year obviously Liz not being able to participate.

It's a part of the sport. We understand that. When I talk to the kids, our expectations are still the same. We know that we can do it, and partly it's because of the leadership that we have.

Cayla might not have shot the ball as well as she wanted to all year, but we still have every bit of confidence in her because she's a staple in our program. And the last thing I'll say is the very first huddle that we had when we got back, I gave a speech, and it was pretty much leaning towards, okay, if you are with us and you have 10 toes down, get in the middle of the circle.

She knows me so well, before I could even finish the speech, she was running to the middle of the circle, and the other kids didn't even know what the hell she was doing, they just followed right behind her and got in the middle of the circle because they said, if Cayla is going to the circle, we'd better get into the circle, too. That's the kind of leadership that she provides.

She knows me extremely well and knows what I want, what I'm thinking. Sometimes too well. But that's the kind of leadership that she provides.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports