

# Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

Tuesday, October 8, 2024  
Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

**Virginia Cavaliers**

**Coach Amaka**

**Agugua-Hamilton**

**Kymora Johnson**

**Paris Clark**

Women's Press Conference



we say grind now, shine later. We want to focus on the little details that go into being successful and getting this program to reach greatness and sustain it.

THE MODERATOR: We know the next step is the dance. This is the ACC. This is what many say is the best women's basketball league in the country. In order to get that, what's the next step for your program to make? Not just the wins, but what do you need to see to know, all right, we're in a place now where we're going to make the dance.

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: I think, one, you have to be hungry. We can't be complacent or anything like that. Also, we need to show consistency every day in practice, which will eventually carry over to games.

Then leadership. Player-led teams are usually pretty successful. We've had a lot of people step up and evolve into great leaders. Some need some work. Some are still evolving. It starts there.

In practice it has to be competitive. I have this old saying that practice has to be harder than the games from back in the day, but it's true. It's very true.

When you get this in place and the camaraderie and synergy and togetherness is all there, then you have a shot to really reach your goals. We're focusing on the little things that go into being great. It's not about we got -- it's not NCAA or bust.

We have to make it there. We have to make it there. It's everybody's goal if you are a competitor. It's the ultimate goal, yes. But how can we win the day? What little things are going to help us be successful today? Let's not waste days. Let's stack these good days and then stack these good weeks and then stack these months, and then we'll get to where we need to be, and the results will take care of themselves.

THE MODERATOR: I know it's October, but give us a preview of what this team is looking for, whether it's pace of play or style of play and maybe similarities from last year, but also some differences.

THE MODERATOR: I would like to welcome Virginia to the stage. Head coach going into her third season, Amaka Agugua-Hamilton, known as Coach Maks from here on out for my benefit.

We also have Paris Clark and Kymora Johnson. Ladies, welcome.

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Thank you. Great to be here.

THE MODERATOR: You had a remarkable turnaround last year. You are a builder. You know how to get this stuff done, but last year seven wins in the program, postseason berth, which we know was the goal when you got there, but you also increased attendance. Does one go hand and hand? Is it chicken or egg, or has it been you and the plan all along?

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: It definitely goes hand in hand. I think we have some of the best fans in the country, and they've been showing up and showing out. They love the style of play that they're seeing. They love our players. Our players are in the community. We give back a lot, as much as we can.

At the same time I agree, I think last year we took some steps forward for sure. We had some big wins. We had significant wins. We had some wins that moved our program forward, but there's still more room to grow, and our players are very hungry. We're very hungry.

Obviously the natural next step would be the Big Dance, NCAA Tournament, this year, but just focusing on consistency and just the work that goes into it. That's why



AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Yeah, it's early. We still have about a month before we play a game, but I like where we're at. I really do.

This group is more athletic I think than we've been since I've been here. So we're playing faster. Our pace is great on both sides of the floor. I think we defend really, really well. We have some post players that can switch out and do some things.

Just our athleticism and our length definitely got better. Then our returners all are very, very hungry. That was a big step we took last year. Went to the postseason for the first time since 2018. To be close -- nobody wants to be close. We were a couple of games away from being in the NCAA tournament. So we're hungry, which is just letting us be really competitive in practice.

I like how we compete. I like how athletic we are. We play with pace and do some things defensively that we haven't been able to do, rebound the ball and have all the energy in the building from our fans.

**Q. My question goes to Kymora and Paris. Y'all both came into this program together. How has that bonded y'all, not just as teammates, but outside of the game as well?**

PARIS CLARK: I mean, yeah. Me and Mo, coming into here we knew each other a little bit, just seeing each other on the circuit or through basketball, but coming here has really, like, bonded us. She's one of my closest friends. I think it helps us on and off the court.

KYMORA JOHNSON: Yeah, I agree. I was coming in here before Paris, but when she came on her visit, right -- yep, her visit -- I was, like, oh, yeah, we have to have her here. I knew it was a relationship I wanted to build and a new teammate that I wanted to have by my side, so...

**Q. Kymora, obviously there was a lot of stand-out freshmen last year, and I feel like the ones that weren't talked about as much was you, but you were amazing last year. Obviously points per game, assists. What is it over the offseason you really worked on and hoped to develop into your sophomore year?**

KYMORA JOHNSON: Biggest thing is probably leadership and efficiency. I think that my leadership role grew definitely last year. It was a new step for me.

It's hard coming in and, like, leading a team, and I didn't take that lightly. I knew it was something I wanted to do. I always strive to be a leader in everything that I do.

This year I think that trying to grow that and build that as much as possible to be the best leader I can to help lead this team to where it should be is my biggest thing right now.

THE MODERATOR: Three new additions to the ACC. For you and your staff, does that change how you approach during the offseason in terms of how you are prepared for this upcoming season, or is it just deal with that when it comes?

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: It didn't change much because, again, I've said it all day, I believe since my first year here, that we are the best women's basketball conference in the country. We've gotten even better and better each year.

I think adding NCAA Tournament teams and caliber teams like Stanford, things like that, is only going to make us better. This conference is a dogfight, and any given day somebody can beat you or you can beat somebody.

From top to bottom I really do think it's a competitive league. Adding more competitive teams doesn't really change how you prepare. I think at the end of the day you have to make sure your team is focused, competes, and shows well in the nonconference so we can build the confidence as a unit to go into conference play.

THE MODERATOR: Paris, what's the one nonnegotiable to play for Coach Mox?

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: One?

THE MODERATOR: Paris, please tell me all the non-negotiables to play for Coach.

PARIS CLARK: Something she puts emphasis on is giving. She knows there's life and we're human, but just as long as you're showing up every day and giving in it your all, and whether it's being good teammate or getting that extra rebound, getting a steal, just giving it your all every day.

THE MODERATOR: Kymora, we mentioned the three new teams. If they were standing here today, what would you say to them in terms of what they need to expect from Virginia basketball?

KYMORA JOHNSON: Well, first, I would say welcome.

THE MODERATOR: You're so polite.

KYMORA JOHNSON: Then I would probably say just get

ready. You know, we were an underestimated team and we had a couple of upsets. I think that people should just be prepared.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Mox right now, as we said earlier, it's October, but what are some strengths that you know that this team will be able to hang their hat on this season?

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Yeah, competing. I definitely feel that's a strength. We have kids that want to win. Focus on one common goal.

Yes, we're going to have fun and enjoy the journey because that's something I preach too, let's create these lasting memories together. But at the end of the day we have kids that are motivated to reach their goals and reach our team goals.

Fast-paced. Our pace is always fast. We practice fast. We work out fast. Rebounding. I think we've got a lot of scorers. We have a lot of people that can fill it up.

**Q. Coach, women's basketball is really growing in the eyes of the public. Everyone talks about UVA men's basketball, but this seem is growing too. In your own words, why should we watch UVA women's basketball this year? What are they going to bring to the table?**

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Everybody talks about UVA men's basketball, and rightfully so. It's a great program, but I think people are talking about us too, just to correct you.

We did have a game in March that had 12,000-something fans, which was something to really celebrate. Broke a record in Virginia. I think that the notoriety of our team has gone up. I think the excitement of our team, especially in our community and surrounding communities, is great.

I think that game that we had was great for women's basketball too because we had all those fans in the building to showcase a really good game against Virginia Tech, who was No. 5 in the country at the time.

You know, for us, number one, high-character program. Operate with high integrity from the top-down. Yes, we're going to have fun and enjoy the journey, but we're going to work. That's why what we say every day is grind now, shine later.

We have hard-working kids that give back. We want to empower the next generation. There's a lot of little kids that come to our games that are excited and look up to them.

We're getting back to the glory days of UVA women's basketball. I know people probably talk about that. Dawn Staley, Debbie, Debbie Ryan, all of those players, Tammy Reese, Wendy Palmer. There are so many greats that came through there, and we have some greats in the making.

So I think people are excited and just broke a season ticket record again, season tickets sold. I love our fans and our community, and it's not just right in Charlottesville. It's UVA fans all around.

THE MODERATOR: Kymora, give us a name of a teammate that maybe people aren't aware of right now that you think give a couple of games, everyone is going to start talking about?

KYMORA JOHNSON: I would say Yonta Vaughn.

THE MODERATOR: Why?

KYMORA JOHNSON: I know personally that she's always had it in her, but I think that there is just something coming, something really special coming this year.

THE MODERATOR: Paris, what about you?

PARIS CLARK: There's a few, but I'm going to say one that I think will really open people's eyes this year. I'm going to give it to a freshman, Bree Hurd. I think she's really going to put herself on the map this year.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, in the ACC we talk a lot about accomplish greatness. What does that mean to you?

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Sacrifice. You know, in order to be great in anything, you have to have tremendous sacrifices. Whether you are a coach, player, whether you are in a different profession, whatever it is, you have to sacrifice. It could be personal, work-related, but what sacrifices are you willing to make to be great, to be able to master your craft, put in extra work, whether it's physical work, mental work, emotional work.

You have to be able to sacrifice some time, sacrifice all kinds of things in order to do that. That is what it means to me.

THE MODERATOR: Paris, give us the scouting report on your teammate.

PARIS CLARK: LeBron.

THE MODERATOR: How would you stop LeBron then?

Give us the positives.

PARIS CLARK: Definitely great knock-down shooter. Really a great overall, all-around player. Can get a stop on defense, knock down a three when needed, hit a floater, nice layup.

THE MODERATOR: All right, guys. Obviously you're on that doorstep in my opinion of what you have built in the last few years. Postseason last year. What is it about what you accomplished last year that now you are able to build upon to propel you into that next step of success, whether that's the NCAA Tournament or moving up higher within the ACC?

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Yeah, you are asking me?

THE MODERATOR: I'm asking all of you.

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: They can answer too, but for me it's consistency. I think we have a lot of talent. I think we have a lot of drive. I think we have a lot of pieces, scorers, defenders, rebounders, things like that. But competing consistently on a daily basis so that we can build those habits and we don't drop games like we did last year or show up a little bit uninterested or whatever it is.

That's the next step. Once we do that and we're consistent, then the chips will fall where they may.

KYMORA JOHNSON: I agree. I was going to say the exact same thing. Consistency. Also just knowing what we're capable of.

We beat great teams, and we know that we can be a great team, so just following through with that is what we need to do.

PARIS CLARK: Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Mox, I know at practice every day, but based on the head nods when you say something, these two are in simpatico with you in terms of leadership. I think that's a good sign for you guys. Finally, one word that you want to just summarize, encapsulate what this season is going to be for you guys this season.

PARIS CLARK: One word?

KYMORA JOHNSON: I'll say resilience. I think that was my word, actually. That was my word. Last year we faced a lot of adversity, and we struggled at first staying resilient, staying positive through that. I think that, like, we know what it takes now. So just having that in the back of our mind and having -- we know what we're capable of. We

know what it takes. That sort of thing is going to help propel us forward.

PARIS CLARK: Yeah. Sorry. Mine is two words, but -- three words, actually. Really it's just wake 'em up. I think that this year we're going to wake everybody up, and like Mo said, just building on what we did last year. It's a sneak speak. Yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Can I get a clarification. Who is them?

KYMORA JOHNSON: It's actually 'em, E-m.

PARIS CLARK: The whole world.

THE MODERATOR: Who is the audience is what I -- got it. The whole world.

PARIS CLARK: Yes.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, you have your hands full.

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Oh, you want me to answer?

THE MODERATOR: Please.

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: I'm going to go with humble and hungry. As long as we stay humble and hungry throughout great wins and adversity and all that, we'll be great.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, Coach, it's been a pleasure. You guys have a tremendous season. Best of luck building on that and getting into the NCAA Tournament.

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