

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Marshall vs Virginia Tech

Friday, March 22, 2024

Blacksburg, Virginia, USA

Cassell Coliseum

Virginia Tech Hokies Coach Kenny Brooks Georgia Amoore Olivia Summiel

Media Conference

Virginia Tech 92, Marshall 49

KENNY BROOKS: I am so proud of these kids, each and every one of them, the way they stepped up. It looked a little dicey in the beginning of the week when we first started trying to go over Marshall, trying to emulate Marshall's pressure, but they were diligent and just trying to understand what we needed to do, how we needed to take care of the basketball.

I can't be more proud of a group. They stepped up, even in Georgia's absence, we played really poised, and we wanted to keep our poise amongst their chaos. Marshall had a tremendous year. Really enjoyed watching their progression from the start to the finish, and Kim does a great job.

I'm proud of our kids. I don't know where to start. Do I talk about Olivia's 14 rebounds? Do I talk about Clara Strack's 17 points? Do I talk about Matilda's Ekh's 21? She gets over 1,000 today. Then Carleigh Wenzel who grew up and was a big girl today. We really, really just appreciated all of it.

Very proud of our kids. Looking forward to advancing.

Q. Olivia, Georgia, you guys shot lights out in the first three quarters. What helped that offense be so prolific tonight?

OLIVIA SUMMIEL: I would say confidence, just belief in each other and our teammates and knowing that when the opportunity came, we all had to step up and knock them down. I think we shared the ball incredibly well today. It



was so fun to be out there playing, just to be able to share the ball in that environment. Hokie Nation was, again, incredible. But it was a really fun team win. I think we moved the ball and found the right shots for the open player.

Q. How about defensively? What did you think you did to make it a tough shooting night for them?

GEORGIA AMOORE: I think Coach had great calls in switching up our defenses. We went from a 3-2 to a 2-3 to man, so I think we kept them on their toes and pushed them into positions where they didn't really thrive in. I must say that we didn't really contest some of their shots and they just missed, so that's something we definitely have to work on for the next game.

But I think overall we just did a really good job of keeping them on their toes.

Q. Georgia, to see Ekh get going like that after the last couple games she's had, how satisfying was that?

GEORGIA AMOORE: It was so great for her and for us. I think the biggest difference is we were having fun, and I think when you have fun and the offense flows, the confidence grows. I'm very proud of Tilly because she was sitting on that 999 number for a hot minute, but she had a day today, and that confidence will carry over for her. She's the type of girl that needs to see it go in, and I'm glad it went in today for her.

Q. Marshall presented a very unique challenge. What about them that they did allowed you guys to have the game that you did, because it seemed like what they were trying to do worked really well early and then you guys just got momentum and took off. What do you think the moment was that really made it click for you guys?

GEORGIA AMOORE: I think their defense, they giveth and they taketh. They have runs where maybe they'll have a few energy plays and hold us to a few stops, but they were giving up a whole lot and they were taking risks and they were leaving people open, so I think we did a good job



at exploiting it when we could.

I think even towards the end, the energy that felt like within the press, it wasn't there anymore. I think they got pretty flat towards the end. So I think we did a pretty good job at breaking it, staying composed like time after time after time. As you said, there was instances where they did creep up on us, but I think overall we did a good job at handling it.

Q. After the ACC Tournament, how did it feel to come back to Cassell and shoot the ball so well?

OLIVIA SUMMIEL: It's incredible, just to be at home. We were really fortunate to earn a 4 seed, and I think that's a testament to the work that we've put in all season long. But to be home in front of Hokie Nation is absolutely an incredible feeling. Really proud, and it was fun to see the ball go in and have the energy spark from the home-court advantage.

Q. Clara Strack making her NCAA debut as a freshman, replacing the three-time ACC Player of the Year, perfect 100 percent from the field, 17 points. What allowed her to have that type of success on the court and the mentality she brought to the game today?

OLIVIA SUMMIEL: Strack attack. That's two words we like to use all the time. She is fun to watch and even more fun to play with. I'm excited to see where her future goes. But she's been huge for us this year. I think Coach Brooks has said it a couple times, she could be starting on other programs, but she's kind of taking her role and learned from the incredible Elizabeth Kitley. Obviously we don't have her with us within this tournament run, but I think Clara has definitely had her leadership to learn from all year long, and to see her step into her own tonight, it was really awesome, and when she confidently knocked down that three, we were gassed for her. That was absolutely incredible. Really happy for her. Strack attack.

Q. You guys give up 20 offensive rebounds but nearly double them up on the defensive end. Could you talk about the effort on that specific end of the glass to kind of offset what they were doing by grabbing some of those offensive boards?

GEORGIA AMOORE: I think that we could have done a much better job obviously at boxing out and grabbing those rebounds because they had those possessions. I think even in the first half, I think that's how they kind of got their -- they chipped it back and it was through second-chance opportunities. That's something that we were good at in the first five minutes and then kind of slip a bit away from

that.

But I don't think necessarily it was mentally us making up for it. I think we were trying to be aggressive, but we definitely had to do a better job at grabbing the defensive boards.

OLIVIA SUMMIEL: I think they have like a chuck-and-chase mentality a little bit. Some of their shot selection is a little all over the place, so I think we needed to do a better job of recognizing that and understanding that wild shots or long shots lead to wild and long rebounds. I think that's just a learning point for us. But we were able to clean it up on the defensive end, which was good.

Q. Olivia, you guys mentioned the mentality and the poise. You had to stay composed. What goes into that, and how proud were you of the ability to -- didn't matter what quarter it was, that you guys were able to stay mentally there?

OLIVIA SUMMIEL: I think it's a testament to two things. One, our coaching staff and the way that they prepared us all week. I wish you guys could be in our practices to see what we went through this week. Just preparing for that pressure and the different style of play that we were facing tonight.

Then I think second, it's a testament to the leadership that we have on our team and the experience. Obviously we have some freshmen out there, but they were able to learn and pick up and understand that in order to handle kind of that pressure and that kind of style of play, you just have to keep your head on your shoulders and stay poised throughout.

Q. Georgia, Kenny mentioned that Carleigh played like a big girl today. What impressed you the most about her composure and the way she handled and facilitated and all that?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yeah, I mean, I don't know, she just looked like she had fun out there seriously. Sometimes she gets in her own head. In practice for sure, it's mistake and mistake and she kind of compounds it. But today, did she have mistakes? Yeah, who didn't? But I was proud of her for the way she continued it on and carried it over and kind of put it away. It was almost like she completely forgot about what happened, which, take it as you will, but for today it was a good thing because her mentality was great and she was aggressive and she even got a little bit of confidence and started celebrating like she was Tom Brady or something like that. She had fun with it, and I'm proud of her. Touchdown!

Q. Georgia, you seemed to have fun on the bench tonight. What was it like for you to see the team doing so well while you were on the bench in foul trouble for much of the game?

GEORGIA AMOORE: No, I was just so proud and having fun with it. They were just all so confident the way they played. It just oozed confidence, and it was just a great vibe.

Starting off the tournament, the first games always can be choppy and dicey. You don't know what to expect. We haven't played a team like this literally this year, period. I'm sure about that. You spend the whole week scouting for it, and you can kind of be dramatic and spiral about it, and I think we were on high alert, but once we got the game going and moving, then it was fun and we were in control.

Q. You also could have been dramatic and spiral about Liz. You didn't have her last week, either. What does it mean to you guys to have won an NCAA Tournament game without her?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yeah, mentally we knew we weren't going to have her so it was about let's step up and play together. At the end of the day, she's a big part of what we do, but we're still us. Like we still have offenses that help us and we're put in positions to be successful. It was just a matter of going out and grabbing those opportunities and making the most out of it.

Q. Rose Micheaux obviously didn't play for like a month and a half or so. What did you see in her mentality that led you guys to have confidence to be like, okay, when we need her, we can trust that she can come in and make an impact, obviously nine points, four rebounds and only 13 minutes today?

OLIVIA SUMMIEL: Yeah, I think Rose has maintained such a good mindset and mentality throughout the entire season. She could have just as easily thrown the towel in and be checked out, but she didn't. She came to practice every day and she pushed herself, and we were able to push each other. I think tonight was a great showing for her. We were happy for her, and she stepped up big when we needed her, especially with the size advantage that we did have on the inside, she was able to move some bodies for sure. We're excited that she was able to have that mentality and that composure throughout the ups and downs of a season. Transferring is not the easiest thing in the world, but we're proud she was able to stick it out and be big for us when we needed her.

Q. I can't imagine you hoped Georgia would get in foul

trouble like that, but is it not the worst thing in the big picture in maybe a sink-or-swim way for the rest of the team to have to step up like that?

KENNY BROOKS: It's ironic, I was at my house and she was at her house, I assume, and we were watching the ACC championship. With I think one and a half minutes to go, the NC State point guard fouled out and the game got a little dicey, and she texted me, and she was like, this is getting a little dicey, and I referred back to a game when we played against Rutgers and she got into foul trouble at the end of the game and we didn't close it out like we really wanted to, and we started laughing. Then when she got into foul trouble here, we just kind of gave each other a look like, knucklehead, I need you on the floor.

But the way that everyone else stepped up, it is a blessing because she got a lot of rest, and obviously she's going to have to do a lot on Sunday, but I'm so proud of the rest of the group and how they were able to step up, keep their poise amongst a lot of chaos -- as I mentioned before, and the first thing I told the whole group was I'm so proud of you guys because everybody stepped up in a positive way, and it was a fun game to watch, a fun game to coach.

Q. Coach, your girls seemed to thrive playing in that environment. Curious what if any effect did you think it had on Marshall the first five, six minutes of the game?

KENNY BROOKS: You'd have to ask Marshall, but what I can attest to, we've played in this environment a lot. Last year at this time it was a little eye-opening because it was the first sellout that we ever played in front of in the tournament. But then since then, I think we had five or six sellouts this year. So our kids are really used to this environment. They thrive off of it. It's definitely something that gives us an advantage. We like to say it's worth about eight to ten points just being in this environment and having Hokie Nation cheer for you.

I've said it a million times, Hokie Nation and this crowd, Cassell Guard, they make a good team great, and that's why we've won so many games in a row here.

Q. For your career, how unique was this Marshall team's play style?

KENNY BROOKS: It's very unique. They're all in. They're committed to the pressure. On a miss, they set up and they're pressing. On a make, they're pressing, they're trapping, they're running around. They're very good at what they do.

I mentioned earlier that it was fun watching them and how



... when all is said, we're done.®

they progressed throughout the year. Their first few games they were trying to do the same things but they weren't as sharp with it. Then towards the end of the year, they got a little more aggressive and they knew what they were doing. We knew it was going to present some challenges for us.

I looked at that box score when they played James Madison, and I still don't understand it. They forced 39 turnovers. They took 46 threes. They took 38-some free throws. I just don't understand how the game was what it was.

But they make you play on your heels, and I thought our kids -- that's why I'm so proud of our kids, because we were the aggressors. I think we had, what, 15 turnovers against that pressure, and so I think we grew up a little bit today.

Q. To me this really became a Carleigh and Clara coming-out party. How proud are you of them and just their progression as players, and this game really just seemed --

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, they're my babies. They just happen to be playing behind two All-Americans. But they also play against two All-Americans every day.

The way that Georgia and Liz mentor them is something special. I think Olivia said it, Clara would be starting for a lot of teams. The way she's progressed this year, I told her, when Liz went down, I said, we keep saying that you're going to be good, you're going to be good, you're going to be good. You need to be good now. I think her mindset -- she's a big smooth. I don't even know if she knew there was an NCAA Tournament. She doesn't get flat. Nothing really shell-shocks her.

But she played exceptionally well and showed off her skills. But Carleigh had a rough week the first couple days of practice against all this pressure. She was turning it over -- I asked her one time, are you colorblind, because she was throwing it to the other team.

As much as I was on her, she still kept her poise and kept on, and she played exceptionally well tonight, and I'm proud of both of them.

Q. You called this yesterday an unorthodox matchup. When during the week did you privately feel, okay, this is going to be a good matchup for us?

KENNY BROOKS: Probably about halftime, honestly. Going into the game, it was really hard because I hadn't seen them play live. Everything was on film. Everything was on film. I couldn't gather their speed and I couldn't

gather our height advantage on film, what it would be.

Not until we got out there and we started running up and down and moving is when I felt good about it because otherwise I just didn't know because I had never seen them before other than on film.

But I thought that our length really bothered them. It really did. We wanted to -- I think Georgia alluded to it. We wanted to funnel them into certain spots. They are very dangerous from three, and they're very dangerous at the lay-up. What they really don't like, what I thought, is they don't really like the mid-range. They didn't like that shot right around the -- we kind of ran them off the three-point line and contested at the lay-up, at the basket, and I thought that was really good defense for us.

We were out of position a couple times and they got some offensive rebounds, but they just rebound with reckless abandon. But I thought we did a really good job defending them.

Q. Marshall averages 24 and a half turnovers forced her game. You guys only gave up 15 today and Georgia Amoore only played about 20 minutes. How pleased were you with your ball security today and especially Carleigh Wenzel playing a large role?

KENNY BROOKS: Man, I'm ecstatic. That was the first thing I said when I walked in there, the poise. When I say they play in chaos, I don't mean that in a bad way. They want the game -- fouls, turnovers. That's like the longest game I think I've ever played. What was it, an hour and 57 minutes, because there was a lot of stoppage. A lot of stoppage in play. I thought the referees did a tremendous job just trying to keep the flow going.

But it's their chaos, and we wanted to be poised. So I thought we won out on that, and therefore that's why we were able to come away with a great win. I'm so proud of these kids and what they did. I just want to go back in there and give them a hug.

Q. Kenny, you mentioned earlier this week Carleigh was having a rough time with it --

KENNY BROOKS: Very rough time.

Q. Olivia said that to be poised like that is a credit to you guys and how you prepared them for this moment. What went into this week to prepare them for this, and what did you like?

KENNY BROOKS: You know what, we went out there so the first day that we were preparing for it, we were doing

practice guys and it was six on five. We had six practice guys running around just trapping and getting after them and playing passing lanes, and for a while we couldn't get the ball across half court. But we kept on doing it, kept on doing it, kept on doing it, and we even played a little game called keepaway where I made them go in half court and put seven practice guys out there and they had to make 10 passes. Pass, catch, pass, catch, running, running, running, and then we told them, and this is nothing against Marshall because I have the utmost respect for Marshall, but we had to put it in a term that they would really understand it in how they were going to come after us. I said, it's like you're in recess and you're the fifth graders and then the second graders want to come play the game and they want to run after you because they're just going to try to get the ball and run after you because they're not as big as you are and they're going to do things to be in position to steal the ball. It almost was like a lightbulb went off, and everything that we were doing was very unorthodox, but they got it. They got it, and they understood it. Then when we got out here and we got to see the speed and feel what the game was going to be like, I thought they handled it really well, and I thought the preparation was really good.

Q. It feels like Matilda really is an X-factor for your team. She was scoreless in her last three games, obviously lit it up today. What was the communication like with her after she struggled a little bit the last three outings, and what allowed her to really open it up today against Marshall?

KENNY BROOKS: So proud of her. She called me after the ACC Tournament and she was down and out because she felt like she didn't help us, and really she didn't. It was affecting other parts of her game.

She called me -- well, she texted me and said can I come to your office. She came to my office, and we said nothing of substance. It was just more that we were in each other's presence and we were talking. I think she understood that I believe in her, and then she believed in me and what we were going to do, and ever since then she's had a different mentality in practice.

She plays like that, we're a really good basketball team, and I was very proud of her and very happy for her, her first time being in the NCAA Tournament. So this is what she came here for.

Q. Tell me more about what you did on the three-point line. Obviously you had the size advantage underneath. You said you ran them off the three-point line. Tell me more about that.

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, it was an aggressive sellout, and it was like we made sure that we were not going to close out short and give them an opportunity to shoot it right in our face because Hayes will do that, Beeman will do that. They'll shoot it right in your face. So we had hand up, and one of my assistants was doing the scout, and she kept saying do not have airplane arms. I didn't know what that meant, but it was like closing out with your arms down, looking like an airplane. So everything we did was high hand, high hand, high hand, and just ran them off the three-point line and made them shoot contested threes when they did shoot it.

Now, we knew they were going to shoot a lot of them. I think they shot 41. But I thought we did a really good job of contesting it or taking it away.

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