

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Virginia Tech vs Baylor

Sunday, March 24, 2024

Blacksburg, Virginia, USA

Cassell Coliseum

## Virginia Tech Hokies Head Coach Kenny Brooks Georgia Amoore Clara Strack

Media Conference

Baylor 75, Virginia Tech 72

THE MODERATOR: Welcome Virginia Tech student-athletes Clara Strack and Georgia Amoore and Head Coach Kenny Brooks.

We will open it up to Coach Brooks for an opening statement.

KENNY BROOKS: Congratulations to Baylor. Played a little bit better than we did tonight. That's what this thing is all about to survive and advance.

Super proud of my kids. It wasn't supposed to end like this. Liz Kitley was supposed to be on the floor to help us fight to help us advance to the next round, and our kids could have very well hung their heads in all the dismay at the time when it happened, but they didn't. They kept their focus. They locked in. They reinvented themselves. They had to reinvent themselves again.

We didn't lose because of lack of effort tonight. We didn't always play great. We had some spells and some things happen that didn't go our way, but very proud of them and their effort.

To my seniors, they left a legacy here at Virginia Tech. We're forever grateful, and we love them to death. This one stings because we felt like we could have advanced, but things just didn't happen our way.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Georgia, I'm sure the Tech fans, as great as the**



regular season was, will kind of look back at this postseason as I big what-if? What if Liz hadn't gotten hurt? Is that how you will think about this postseason as well?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Our season isn't defined by the postseason. To be regular season champions is something that's incredibly difficult to do. I think we played consistent throughout the year, and that's what it is. It's regular season champions, and we were the most consistent team, and we had a bloody good time doing it.

Obviously we got dealt a pretty hard deck of whatever you call it. What's the saying? We got hard done by towards the end of the season obviously with Liz going out and not having the opportunities to -- or the time to completely reinvent ourselves like the teams we played against. They're who they were developed the whole year, and we just didn't have that time.

It's not like we look at this game and think, Well, what a waste of a season because I'm so proud of these girls and the development we've had and the relationships we've built and the direction the program is going. I'm super proud of the girls.

**Q. Georgia, obviously this was the last game for Cayla King. You've played with her for the past four years. How would you define her legacy at Virginia Tech?**

GEORGIA AMOORE: She's just been so solid. She came in, and she used to cry every bloody practice, and freshman year she was just emotionally a bit unstable, but she's developed, and she's grown. She's been solid for us.

She's had some ups. She had some downs, but you can't take away who she is. She's a regular season champ. She's an ACC Tournament champ. She's a Final Four participant.

Her career here has been nothing short of amazing, and I hope that when she looks back, she doesn't look back at this game. She looks at the whole four years because she's the epitome of trusting the process.



**Q. It seems like we are going to talk about this after every home game, but I wanted to get your thoughts at the end of the season here, what Cassell has meant to you, reflecting on your time playing here?**

CLARA STRACK: I would say I think Cassell is just amazing. The fans that we have that show up every game no matter who we're playing is just so special to have here and to have them behind us all the time.

**Q. Can you kind of speak to your confidence level compared to earlier in the season? You just had your first career double-double tonight, and it seems like your emergence has been one of the key parts of this team. Just kind of compare what level of confidence you're feeling now in the past couple of weeks in this emergence versus what it was at the beginning of the year.**

CLARA STRACK: I would say that I definitely gained a lot of confidence throughout the season. That's going to happen as you play no matter what, but I think knowing that I had to gain that level of confidence, knowing I had to play who I am and be who I am out there, I think that's what really just pushed me over to have that confidence.

**Q. What was the mentality going into last 20 seconds when you were down and cutting it close?**

GEORGIA AMOORE: It's March. Anything can happen. There's still plenty of time. There's still the ability to hit shots. We've seen it all the time.

I think -- yeah, I don't think any of us were thinking negatively or anything like that, so...

**Q. What was the defensive look you guys got on that final inbound play that kind of caused that chaos on the inbound?**

GEORGIA AMOORE: I can't really remember. Sorry, I was setting up a screen.

**Q. Georgia, let me ask you the same question I asked Liz at the end of the Final Four press conference a year ago. If this is your last game, how will you remember your Virginia Tech career?**

GEORGIA AMOORE: I've had a time. I came here, and I was not good, couldn't shoot, probably a little too overweight, probably too slow, had too much fun, had to get reeled in.

But I got here, and it was the perfect place for me to settle in and kind of not control myself, but lock in on basketball.

It's a perfect place to do that.

I came here, and I trusted Coach Brooks 100 percent even when I didn't trust in myself. It's paid off immensely. I couldn't be more grateful for our time together.

I think being a foreigner, I come over to America, and America is fun, but Blacksburg is the place where I've developed, and it's kind of like my home away from home. I couldn't be more appreciative of how it's transformed me as not only a basketball player, but a person, and it's because I surrounded myself with great people.

I truly think that I came out of high school. I had four offers or whatever. I took two visits, and one of them just happened to be here, and that's a blessing in disguise. I didn't know at that time how it would play out, but I took the chance, and I'm very, very grateful that I did because I've got him for life now. I've loved it, and I couldn't be more grateful.

**Q. Clara, what has it meant to you to play with Georgia, to play with Liz, to play with Cayla? How will you remember your time playing with them, and what are some of your favorite memories of them?**

CLARA STRACK: Yeah, all three of them are amazing obviously basketball players, but they're also amazing people. All three of them have taught me so many things about honestly life in general.

I don't think that I could have played these past few games the way I did without Liz's guidance through the year. She's helped me so much, developed me so much in so many ways. She's always been my biggest supporter and teacher at the same time.

**Q. I can't help but notice Kenny's face as you guys are talking. What has Kenny specifically meant to both of you guys because as you guys are talking, he looks like a proud papa. It's great. What has he meant to you guys specifically?**

CLARA STRACK: He's honestly like the best coach I could have asked for coming in here. He pushes me every day no matter what. He knows the potential that I have, and he knows that who I can be so, he is pushing me to get there. That's what I need.

I would say that he just cares so much about every one of us that he's really just the best coach that I could have come here and gotten.

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yeah, we would be here for two hours if I said everything I had in my mind right now. Just

to sum it up, this is my second dad. Seriously, basketball, all that, but off court. I am fearful that we are the same person. I'm a 23-year-old woman, and I think I act a little too much like him.

That's my second dad. That's my American dad. We've been through some tough times. We've been through some great times. It's a relationship that I'll cherish for the rest of my life. I know that I always have him, and I love him to death.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us. Questions for Coach Brooks.

**Q. Kenny, obviously this is the end of the Liz and Cayla era. I don't know if it's going to be the end of Georgia or not or, heck, for you or not. How will you remember this chapter of Tech basketball?**

KENNY BROOKS: The most amazing stretch of my coaching career. Not only just because of the championships we won, but those two, those three, they're incredible people. I couldn't have asked for better people to come in here and transform this program.

You can be a great player, but if you don't have the mentality, the work ethic, and the ability to lead people -- when I say lead, I mean, they lead our program, but they also help lead this community. The affect that they've had on this community not only young people, old people, they've made a lot of people women's basketball fans here at Virginia Tech.

Sometimes when you get players of that caliber, sometimes you have to sacrifice a little bit. You have to sacrifice maybe integrity, but those kids are the full package. They're great kids, and what they've done for this program, this community, for me, you can't even put it into words. That's how special they are.

**Q. Can you speak to the growth of the newcomers like Ekh and Strack? Back in November you were trying to get them ingratiated, and now you are relying on them in big games?**

KENNY BROOKS: Matilda came in, and she wanted to get to this level, and she wanted to be able to play at this level. She had to get acclimated to everything we did, and she did it perfectly.

Always the consummate teammate. Just wanted to come out and play hard each and every day. She had some good games, some bad games, but nonetheless, she's a Hokie, and she came out, and it was great.

Clara, that's my baby. You guys don't understand. She turned 18 about two months ago, and we were going to redshirt her. We thought we were going to bring her in here and immediately she got here, and we were, like, man, she's too good, and she can help us go to where we need to go.

I am a proud papa because the very first press conference she had, I think she said two words, and I think she mixed them up, and then she comes up here now, and she's watching Liz, and she's watching each and every one of the kids in our program and learning how to represent our program.

She's a star, man. She's going to be a star. What you saw tonight, it takes a lot for a freshman who has not played a prominent role all year long to come on this stage in front of this crowd with everything at stake to perform like she did. I was very, very proud of her.

**Q. Just some more about Matilda Ekh with her struggling those last three games and then what she was able to do this weekend, 16 points in the second half today. What can you say about what she was able to do in these two games?**

KENNY BROOKS: She has a heart of a lion. She comes out, and she hurt. She hurt bad where she had those three straight games where she didn't score. She asked me, Could we meet?

It was so funny because I don't even know what we talked about, but it was just being in the presence, and she knew that I trusted her, and she came out, and she had a different look in her eye because she wants to be -- she wants to help the team win.

I thought she played exceptionally well this weekend, and I'm very proud of her. I'm very happy for her to be able to experience this.

**Q. How important is the culture and kind of the leadership that Liz and Cayla and, whether Georgia returns or not, Georgia have set for the next generation in terms of kind of keeping this standard up in terms of the success that Virginia Tech has had?**

KENNY BROOKS: It's everything. Like I mentioned before, there are a lot of talented players across the country, but the way that they've gone about their business and the young players are watching them and they're emulating what they do.

Sometimes you just do the extra, you go the extra mile just because, well, Liz and Georgia and Cayla did it, so I guess

we're supposed to do it as well. Liz and Georgia are All-Americans, and they work as hard. They're in the gym more than anyone, and when the others see that, they're, like, okay, I better get in the gym as well.

That's the most important thing when you are building a program. You can have a great team, but if that team is just in and out and they don't leave a lasting culture, you're going to start over every year. These young kids right now, they're learning. They're learning and they're going to do the same things. They're going to emulate the same things. They're going to say the same things that Liz, Georgia, and Cayla did. That's how you build a program.

**Q. As far as the game, a couple of questions on the last 12 seconds. Obviously Walker got the ball with 12 seconds to go. What made it so tough for you guys to -- you took about six seconds for you to catch up to foul her, and that would have given you more time for that last play. What did you draw up for the last 1.3 seconds there?**

KENNY BROOKS: At first we were out of time-outs, and it was two plays right in a row where she took a lot of time off the clock. The reason she took a lot of time off the clock is because she's very elusive. We were actually switching, and we actually got Olivia on her so it took a little bit longer for us to come up with the foul.

We tried to switch the matchup so that Olivia would not be the one that was chasing her, but ironically it was so loud in there they couldn't hear me. She was able to take a lot of time off the clock. I think it took it to 5.9.

Then on the inbounds play we didn't have a time-out again. It took a long time for them to look at it because at first when we drew up the play that we had, we had .8 seconds left. The kids walked out, and I think they gave us 1.3, and I don't know if -- we tried to relay it that we had 1.3.

The one thing I haven't seen yet, I didn't know if the ball got tipped when they inbounded the ball. That's why Georgia shot the ball the way she did because I thought she had a little bit more time. I couldn't tell if the ball was tipped or not, but I think we would have gotten a good look, but we just couldn't deliver. We couldn't execute the play because I think the inbounder was big on Carleigh. I thought we had a good look. We were going for Tilly to shoot a three, and we just didn't execute it.

**Q. You mentioned Walker and her elusiveness there at the end. Throughout the entire second half it seems like she was a pretty big handful. How troubling was her quickness just overall?**

KENNY BROOKS: I think she averaged 7.5 points a game and she came down, and she was big in the second half. She hit a lot of the midrange, got to the basket, finished a couple of the layups.

We probably let her get downhill a little too much. We were supposed to be going under the screen and make her shoot from deep, but we got clipped a couple of times out front. She had been going downhill against our bigs and created some problems.

She hit some big shots, those midrange shots. I'm assuming this is one of her better games that she's played this year, but she stepped up for them, and she was a big reason why they won the basketball game.

**Q. You guys shot 32 percent from three-point range tonight. I know Baylor is a great defensive team on the perimeter. How much was it their defense, and how much was it just shots that might normally fall just not falling tonight?**

KENNY BROOKS: If you ask Nicki, she'll say it's her defense. If you ask me, I'll say we missed shots. I just think especially not seeing -- not watching film yet, but I thought we got some good looks. We just didn't knock some of them down.

That's this time of the year. You have to make shots. I thought we got some of the looks. They contested some of the ones we took that. They actually even blocked a couple of them. I thought we got some good looks, and we just didn't connect on them.

**Q. You said this has been the most amazing stretch of your career. I know you have the lake house that you go to every summer when you have a chance to go there and reflect on this. How do you think you'll remember this season?**

KENNY BROOKS: I probably will be 75 before I can sit back and reflect on it because of the nature of college basketball now. Tonight I'll be recruiting in the portal. You have to try to make sure that you're managing your roster.

It's a little bit unfortunate. That's a little bit of a stretch. I will remember this group. They're like my daughters. Like Georgia said, we're connected for life just because of the things that we went through because when I got here, I think we were picked 14th in the ACC my first year. 13th or 14th.

To get this program to where it is, and that building is loud. It wasn't just because it was NCAA game. There was people there trying to make a good team great. A lot of

that has to do with the kids that we talked about earlier and what they've done and how they have represented. This is a passionate fan base. They will support you.

All that combined, I still walk by, and I have basketballs in my house that say Final Four, and I still have to pinch myself. That was us. We were there, and we belong there.

If it weren't -- I know injuries are part of it, but I promise you, if it weren't for Liz going down, I thought we were poised to make another run. We were on a stretch. We won ten straight ACC games, and we had a bad game at Notre Dame, but we were ACC regular season champions with a chance to regroup and go into the tournament. Then Liz's unfortunate situation just kind of derailed us a little bit, and we had to try to reinvent ourselves.

It's a part of it, and these kids are special, and I'll always remember the ride they took us all on.

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