

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Liberty vs Kentucky

Friday, March 21, 2025

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Memorial Coliseum

Kentucky Wildcats

Coach Kenny Brooks

Dazia Lawrence

Georgia Amooore

Media Conference

Kentucky 79, Liberty 78

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KENNY BROOKS: The beauty of this part here is you can say survive and advance. That's what we did today. I thought we had a really good showing in the opening half. Played pretty good the third quarter.

But I think that's where you need to give credit to Liberty. They did a fantastic job exploiting us in certain areas.

They did a really good job. We have to be much better in the post. We elected to go with a one-on-one approach and didn't win a lot of those battles and they took advantage of it.

We knew it was going to be a tough battle. Carey's teams play hard and very talented and unorthodox. Something we haven't seen in a while because nobody plays like that in the SEC.

So took us a little while to adjust, but thank goodness for Georgia's performance. Her and Dazia really carried us from a mental standpoint and we have to have others step up if we want to continue on.

Q. Georgia you were finding opportunities to create opportunities all day. Can you talk about what you saw in the defense that you were able to exploit?

GEORGIA AMOORE: I mean, just the break since about -- we lost to Oklahoma. I think I took two days off, and haven't stopped since trying to get back in a flow, find



shots and create shots, create shots for everyone else, too. It's just the confidence that I have in myself but, it's the preparation as well.

Q. Georgia, were you aware that you were one point away prosecute breaking the scoring record by a player in a tournament game?

GEORGIA AMOORE: No.

Q. In those last kind of two minutes when they were able to cut it to four and then three and then one, what were you guys saying to the rest of your team to get in the moment and pull that one out?

GEORGIA AMOORE: I think just to meet the energy and the moment. You know, you see it by the bank three. Anything can happen. We had to be on guard and kind of the initiate oars and not reactive. In that stretch we were reactive.

DAZIA LAWRENCE: Also just stay calm, poised, focused. It's March. Anything can happen.

So just staying true to ourselves and not letting anything else make us make mental mistakes like that.

Q. What were they doing differently in the fourth quarter to slow you all down offensively, especially how well you were in the first three quarters?

GEORGIA AMOORE: I mean, they definitely turned up the intensity and the pressure. We can't get stagnant. We have to keep moving and creating for each other and just be confident. Move to want to shoot. Move to want to be open. Just I don't think we had the mindset like we did in the first half.

Q. Georgia this is your fifth straight NCAA tournament. Does this one feel different knowing it is your last one?

GEORGIA AMOORE: No. It's the same mentality every tournament. I think within the five I've had very different outcomes all five, so obviously want to make the push this



last one and treat it as such.

But the mentality has always just been the same, to just go out and put your best effort out.

Q. Dazia, when Liberty starts to make that run, just from your perspective, things aren't going well offensively, what did you have to do to kind of make sure you stay calm in this moment?

DAZIA LAWRENCE: Just focus on defense. If is offense isn't flowing we have to focus on defense and getting stops so we can try to go in transition, because we can really go in transition. That's my focus and that's the rest of the team's focus.

When one thing isn't working we have to pick it up in it another aspect of the game.

Q. For both Georgia and Dazia, toward the end of the first half there, when they had cut it to seven and Georgia you had the ball, could you both talk me through what you were seeing on the court that kind of led Georgia, you finding Dazia in the corner for what turned out to be a very critical three pointer there at the buzzer?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yeah, coming down the court we knew we were going to set a ball screen, and they like to iso, so as soon as she jumped I was able to cut her off. I know that the help turned their heads and I knew Dazia will always be in that corner, so I kind of threw it -- I think it was an off pass. I threw it kind of knowing she was there, but I knew she was going to hit it down.

DAZIA LAWRENCE: And just playing off Georgia, I know any time she comes off the screen I need to go in the corner and rise up so I can be in those gaps so she can find me and just knock the shot down.

Q. 12:00 game on a Friday; great atmosphere. What's your message to Big Blue Nation for Sunday?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Come out and do the same. We have a great game. Whoever wins this next game, they're a good team and we can see that. Obviously this game, you know, the crowd does help. The energy, momentum helps.

DAZIA LAWRENCE: Come out and support like G said. They pump up our energy so it really helps. Come out, support, and just you're going to have a great time. Next game we're going to make it a lot more fun than this game. Just come out and support us.

Q. For either of you guys, obviously third quarter looking closer to maybe a 20-point win and things went the other direction. Any positives you can take?

GEORGIA AMOORE: I mean, maybe alarmed us to how much -- you know, I don't want to use that excuse, but a new group, first tournament for a lot of the girls. It's a situation where, yeah, we might be the higher seed, but Liberty had nothing to lose. They wanted to come out and win and had all the energy.

So I think in a positive light to recognize that, oh, like everyone wants that spot. Everyone wants to advance. It's not the non-conference from conference where it's up 20 and ride it out. We have to keep the pedal down.

DAZIA LAWRENCE: I agree with everything she said, yeah.

Q. You turned on the film for Liberty and they go through Smuda a lot. It was Stout who was really working in the fourth quarter. What was so difficult about her?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, I was disappointed with our post defense. We let the kids know we got to be better. I thought we were late. She did a really good job establishing position down low and then she has a sweeping hook where it's really hard to defend it if you can't get down low.

So she played really well. Smuda played well, too. They hit some tough shots. That's an area we talked about. Obviously we don't have much time to get ready for the next opportunity, but we will talk about our post defense.

Q. Coach, from our perspective, we tend to think about these win-or-go-home games, tightness, especially in a situation like that where you're on the ropes a little bit. What do you as a coach do to make sure you don't get tight?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, stay calm. Stay confident in our kids. I thought what happened down the stretch -- and this is just my recollection without watching film -- they made shots and we didn't. That sounds very obvious, but we missed some shots, some back rim shots and it allowed us -- took our energy away.

Then we were playing not to lose as opposed to win the basketball game. You have to give them credit. They were the aggressors. When you're down like that you don't have much to lose. Might as well go all out.

They were aggressive and confident in their shots. I



thought once we missed a few we were a little bit tentative, especially going down the last five minutes. We were just trying to Band-Aid every situation because Teonni and Clara fouled out. Kind of took away our anchor for our post defense.

Q. Coach, with Teonni and Clara both fouling out, walk us through what you were thinking when that critical travel call was called.

KENNY BROOKS: This is a PG. No. (Smiling.)

You know, there is a lot. It's got to be next play mentality. Obviously momentum was not in our favor and so I had to figure out what we wanted to do, how we wanted to do it.

And it's thin, obviously our bench is thin right now. I thought Clara Silva came in and did an okay job at the end for us. They all had to be better. We need Teonni and Clara on the floor. I didn't think either one of them played particularly well from an emotional standpoint.

Clara had decent numbers, but I thought both of them were a step slow. A lot of that you can attest to it's been 14 days since the we played.

So I think I counted; Liberty had played four or five games since our last game. So we knew it was going to be a little bit of either rested or rusted, and I thought we just didn't have that cohesiveness throughout the basketball game.

Q. Kenny, when you were looking at coming over here and obviously Dazia transfers, Georgia, when you were looking at the mix of who you wanted to have on a team to make a run, what were the key criteria you were looking at?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, just good kids. Kids who are willing to sacrifice a little bit of themselves for the betterment of the team. I knew Georgia to was going to be a mainstay in what we were going to try to do. That actually us in the recruiting process. When Dazia had an opportunity to play with Georgia she wanted to jump on it.

Jordan Obi was the same way. Teonni, same way. We just wanted to build around it and make sure we put pieces together and not just have a collection of talent.

I thought we did a really good job of that. Evident by the way they've come together, play together. You would look at them and think they been together for a while. More astonishing thing is we didn't scrimmage one time until mid-September.

They're just locked in. It was clumsy in the beginning but

they really got it together because they really trust each other.

Q. Coach in the last game of your team had 20 turnovers and today only seven. Was that something you emphasized head into the tournament in practice?

KENNY BROOKS: No. But we honestly don't talk about turnovers. They know when they turn the basketball over and when it's a bad turnover. We want them to stay aggressive. They know right from wrong. So it's not something that we harp on. If I keep talking about turnovers they'll try to not make a turnover and make a turnover.

We just want them to stay aggressive and obviously too, it's the style of play. Liberty plays a lot like we do on the defensive end. They don't get out in the passing lane. Not going to cause havoc on the perimeter and stealing the basketball. They protect the paint.

So it's just really the nature of who you're playing.

Q. Dazia and Georgia both alluded to it, but how much was crowd a factor especially coming down the stretch?

KENNY BROOKS: From my perspective, I really don't know. I've coached in 900 games, whatever, and you're in the moment. You know, they feed off it and it's really good. I know they love it. Big Blue Nation is awesome. The renovations with the new place, the energy in there, the setup, it's perfect for women's basketball.

So it's going to give us that push. I just learned to tune stuff out and don't really hear. Like my wife talking -- yeah, you just have to tune some things out. You done it so many times you just kind of are in the moment.

I love my wife, though.

Q. Good recovery.

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah.

Q. From an outsiders perspective, Silva looked like she had a pretty good game. You described it as okay. From your perspective, what would you say she did well? What were you looking more of from her?

KENNY BROOKS: I'm mad at all four of them right now, so not going to talk a whole lot. No. Again, give credit to Liberty. They did a really good job exploiting us down low. They all know they have to play better. They do. They have to play early defense.



You can attest some that to the fact that this is the first game out of the last 18 we played against a non-SEC team. A little bit different the way they run their office. I will admit they probably surprised our kids a little bit with their strength and post up. The Stout is a freshman but Smuda is a senior.

They just compromised under the circumstances a little bit and we have to be better on that end, all four of them, in order for us to be better and win.

Q. Coach, something you talked about yesterday was that you guys have been emphasizing playing a full four quarters. Then today happens. What are you telling your girls going ahead?

KENNY BROOKS: Get ready for who we play Sunday. This time of the year, you know, you can have the feelings that you have right now. But soon as I walk out of here I'm going to be focused on the next game. We won't even watch film. Maybe a couple clips so the kids can understand what they need to do.

We need to be focusing our full attention on the next game. They need to be better. I need to be better. I thought in the fourth quarter some of us stood around a little bit. I thought we were waiting for Georgia to bring us home a little bit.

But we all got to be present in the moment. There are some things that I would do differently. I need to do differently. But you learn. This time of the year you are playing against so many new teams you are just going to -- you want to -- you have to adjust but you want to advance.

So we'll focus that attention on ourselves and get ready for the next opportunity.

Q. Down the stretch you were talking about them playing through the post and your defense. What about a change for you guys maybe in going through the post for you guys?

KENNY BROOKS: We played 20, 30 games and we haven't done that yet. Pretty much our offense, you know, you have to play to your strengths. We are -- if we can pull bigs away physical therapy basket it gives us a lot of driving lanes so now we can penetrate and kick. Clara scores in a variety of ways. She's not like a Stout where she's going to be the block and turn and that's all she does.

She is one of the best passing post players, so we are going to utilize all her skillsets. So it's gotten us this far. It's who we are. You're not going to try to reinvent yourself

in March. What you're going to try to do is just get better at what you do and maybe through a couple twists in there.

It's gotten us this far and we're just going to continue doing what we've done.

Q. Coach, same question I had for the girls. Any positives you can take from this game taking Liberty's best punch late and still coming up with the win, especially with a groups that's a little bit maybe less experienced on this level than you're used to?

KENNY BROOKS: Absolutely. We get to play Sunday. That's the best thing we can take from this. It is. They're new. Other than Georgia. She came out like this was her 29th NCAA first round tournament. I thought Dazia had really good energy. Clara was a little bit off. I thought she played through some emotions and kind of took her out of her game a little bit.

Teonni, first time playing in an NCAA with a prominent role. Clara Silva, first time in an NCAA tournament. It's a different feel. So now when you go out there, Amelia Hassett, same thing. When you go out there, it's not like, okay, you loose today. Who do you have on Sunday. It's you lose today and you're done.

You're done. So I think it was good. Obviously the first round opponent, get that under your belt it's good. I think they'll have a different mindset, different emotion, level, when it comes to Sunday. So that's the good part about this.

That's why you hear coaches right now say survive and advance. When I walk out of here you guys probably won't talk about this game forever. You know, we'll be onto the next one. That's what the tournament is all about. It wouldn't be madness without stuff like this.

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