

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Virginia Cavaliers

Coach Aaron Roussell

Breana Hurd

Kymora Johnson

Women's Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the 2026 ACC Tip Off Q&A. I'm happy to welcome Virginia to the stage. Head coach Aaron Roussell. We have Breana Hurd in the middle and then Kymora Johnson at the end. Thank you for being with us today.

Aaron, return five players from last year's Sweet 16 team and welcome four transfers, along with four freshmen. For ACC fans who don't know your system or style of play, can you describe it and what should we expect from this team?

AARON ROUSSELL: Yeah, I mean, think it's something for us we put a high priority on spacing, movement, trying to be hard to guard. Maybe there's some direction early in a possession of kind of where we want people to go to, but I think it requires a lot of trust from coaches into our players.

I think we do a lot of stuff skill work, do a lot of stuff in our practices to get them, quote, to learn how to play.

Then we just kind of play off of that and stack actions on top of that. I think it's a fun system to coach, a fun system to play, and I think these guys, especially these two, are going to really fit in very, very well with that.

With Kymora, obviously at the point guard spot, as a new coach and you have somebody like that that knows the league, knows everything else. I think there's so much newness with the staff, even the players that are coming back in new roles that have some solid backbone is obviously a comfort for me as a coach.

THE MODERATOR: How have the early practices gone of implementing this new system?

AARON ROUSSELL: It depends how early we talk about



it. Very, very early, very difficult for them just in the sense because it was new. Trying to get them out of their comfort zone, I think they probably didn't feel the best about it. That's what I wanted.

I don't know if they knew that at that point that we wanted them out of their comfort zone to grow, but I'll tell you this, and I said this at the last practice, if we continue to progress and improve at the rate that we have already, I really like where this team is going to go.

I think there's been a lot of growth. There's been a lot of learning. I'm very proud of them, but I think there's obviously still room to grow there as well.

THE MODERATOR: Kymora, I'll start with you, you describe this system and how you think you're going to excel in it.

KYMORA JOHNSON: Yeah, I think it's a lot of spacing, which is really fun to be in. A lot of spacing, a lot of cutting, moving, just playing off of each other. I think the biggest thing that I've noticed and tried to implement is getting teammates open and getting them the best shot possible, not putting them in jail. Right?

But, no, I think it's been really fun to see his play come to life. Obviously made every I made the decision to come back. I saw a little bit of it at the beginning, but playing in it has been really fun, so...

THE MODERATOR: Breana, Virginia was the darling of the NCAA Tournament a year ago. What have you guys taken from that experience that propels you into this season?

BREANA HURD: I think we've taken the hard work that it took to get there, just knowing that we need to work hard to keep thriving, to keep growing. So if we just keep working hard, we're going to end up back in the same place we want to be.

THE MODERATOR: Aaron, you have had success at every stop of the way, including a number of wins over myself as a head coach. A 72% win percentage as well as



five NCAA Tournament appearances. What are your non-negotiables when building a program?

AARON ROUSSELL: I think the build is just really the high standards that it takes. I think one thing that we always say that we're not allowed to say is that's good enough, and so whether that's work in the gym, whether that's preparation from staff, whether that's preparation with our players, I think just living life with the high standard. I think high standards of them. I don't mean that trying to make them feel guilty about not doing things, but I think when we can put that on them and they have real accountability for themselves, real accountability for each other, I think great things have happened.

I think you're seeing some of that already.

THE MODERATOR: Kymora, much was made about you entering the portal a season ago and then deciding to return to Virginia and play for Coach Roussell. What have your early impressions been of him and of the system? I keep talking about the system, because he's had success every step of the way with it.

KYMORA JOHNSON: I don't really know that I expected anything. I wasn't really sure what to expect. I didn't know him. But, no, it's been really fun to get to see him break down basketball.

I think he really takes it to the nitty gritty details, and I think that that's been really fun to learn because I feel like part of my last year I wanted to maximize my potential, and I think that starts with the little details.

So I've been really grateful to be a part of that, so...

THE MODERATOR: Breona, you missed some time last season due to a midseason surgery. How did watching the game help you be a better player come this season?

BREONA HURD: I think it helped me grow my voice just watching on the sideline, being able to lift up my teammates, get hyped for them. Just growing my voice, growing being able to communicate is helping me this year being able to communicate. He tells us to talk all the time, so communicating.

THE MODERATOR: Aaron, obviously at Richmond, not too far away, so I'm assuming you saw this team play a number of times, but specifically Kymora a year ago. What's been the pleasant surprise of coaching her on a day-to-day basis?

AARON ROUSSELL: Yeah, I say superstar. I think when you see a superstar you don't know the ins and outs and

how much is God's gift, how much of this is really trying though perfect her craft.

The eagerness and willingness to learn I think is really what stood out. I probably have said this to her. I've said this to everybody that would listen. Obviously her being from Charlottesville, everybody seems to know her in Charlottesville. I think the opening that the world got to her last March, you know, more than just Charlottesville got to see her.

But this is not her just saying, hey, I'm a finished product. She is eager to learn, whether that's in film. She asks the why. I think it challenges me to make sure that she sees the why behind all of it, but she's a true student of the game. I think you see a little bit of fire that she's even enjoying that even more than what I thought she did when we first started.

Q. Kymora, stamina in the playoffs. Based on this new system that you're under now, do you feel that you'll have a better sense of having stamina during the playoffs when you need it the most?

KYMORA JOHNSON: Yeah. I think this past year was a lot. I think, you know, I learned through the wins and the loss, but I think it was fun to be able to be out there and compete at that level.

Obviously I dreamed of that moment and I got it, so I was going to seize that opportunity. But we have great guards, great other dynamic guards, that will allow me to get off the ball a little bit, so I'm really excited for that.

Really excited to see them get their moment on this stage, so yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Breona, last year this team finished 11-7, tied for eighth in the ACC, yet you were one of the final 16 teams in the nation. Can you speak to how the ACC prepares you for postseason play and why your preparation throughout the ACC season helped you guys make that run?

BREONA HURD: Yeah, I think we were hard-working. We put in the work. And we knew playing in the ACC was a lot of competitive teams, so being able to compete and, like, with the aggressiveness just going into the tournament being aggressive, being the more competitive team, just growing that work.

THE MODERATOR: You guys are the ones with the ACC experience. Aaron does not have it. What has your message been to your coaching staff regarding ACC play?

KYMORA JOHNSON: I don't know that we've really talked about it much, but I think that he is a nerd of the game, and I think he knows more than we do about the ACC.

But, no, I mean, I think he's going to figure it out as we go and that's part of the process, but I do think that he has a good feel about it, so...

THE MODERATOR: Ditto.

BREONA HURD: Agree.

AARON ROUSSELL: Agree with the nerd part? I'm just making sure. Fair enough.

THE MODERATOR: You were the first person that called your head coach a nerd, so I appreciate that.

Kymora, you continue to rewrite the Virginia record books. Threes made in a game at ten; threes made in a season, 103; 27 points and a half. You did all these things while also leading the ACC in assists in league play. What are the individual goals this season? What are the team goals?

KYMORA JOHNSON: Individually I think I want to just be a better teammate. I want to be able to, like I said, maximize my potential, whether that's assisting, rebounding, just talking. I want to be the best at all of the things.

I do have a little bit of perfectionist mindset with that, but I think just setting that goal and working towards that is the biggest thing for me.

I think as a team, obviously we want to piggyback off of last year, but most of all just keep building the identity of UVA women's basketball.

THE MODERATOR: Breona, tell me what you think or who you think will be the X factor for this team to take the next step in the ACC?

BREONA HURD: I think Mary. Mary is very competitive. She's a very strong guard. She can play both sides of the balling. Just watching her grow is going to be something fun to see.

THE MODERATOR: Aaron, we talked about the offense. We've talked about the spacing. What do you believe it takes to be successful in the ACC?

AARON ROUSSELL: Yeah, obviously from the offensive side of it, I think there has to be some building of the chemistry, right? We can say that we have great players,

which we do. We can have talent. We can have all of these things. Even when you've had groups that have been together for a long time, it takes some time during the season until it really clicks.

I think that's what's always exciting is my staff has heard me say this. Whether it's January, whether it's Christmas time, there's different times, but you always look at them like, hey, we just figured some things out. I think that is obviously vital to it.

I know we talk about the offense, but obviously we have to get after it defensively too. I think going into this and the physicality of the ACC, we know what we are, but we also know what we're not. We need to be a solid rebounding team. It was a strength of theirs last year.

We have different pieces right now. If you walk into our practices, you see me challenging us on the boards. Make sure we take care of the basketball, but challenging ourselves on the board, and that's a big telltale sign of where this team goes.

Q. A question for Coach. A big talking point of this conversation has been the new system for these players, but when talking about the culture, what factor from these players of the culture of the locker room have you been able to embrace, and how do you plan on shifting the culture of the locker room more towards your own strategy?

AARON ROUSSELL: It's a great question. I think so many coaches come in and talk about culture. I think it's maybe an overused term now to come in and try to change everything. Obviously they had success last year, and so I don't think we wanted to come in and wipe all of that clean and forget about all of that. They had a great thing, and you saw the result of what that was at the end of the season.

So I think a little bit of as a coach, as a CEO of a program, yes, you need to implement your culture. You need to implement your standards, your expectations, but out of respect to these guys, I wanted to kind of talk about what was good and what was liked, whether that's retention of staff, whether it's retention of things that were going well last year. I think that was important to me and my staff.

Then I think there's a blend, but yeah, I think the nonnegotiable is still just the level to which we hold ourselves accountable and those standards.

Maybe the standards is a different way of saying the word culture because I think it does get a little bit overused, but I think when you live life the right way and do things to the

right standard, good things are going to result.

I think you are seeing -- I know you're seeing the beginning signs of that right now.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with you, and Aaron, you'll finish it up, but I'll ask you to give me one word to describe Virginia women's basketball this season.

KYMORA JOHNSON: I'm going to say fun. I think that that's been a big emphasis for us obviously. New team, new staff. Just having fun with it. Especially for me, my maybe last year, just having fun and putting our best foot forward, so...

BREONA HURD: I'll probably say hard-working because we want to put in the work, we want to work hard, prove ourselves, but also having fun while working hard.

AARON ROUSSELL: She got two words, so I'm going take two. I think for me it's improvement. I think that is something that I take a lot of pride in as a coach, put a lot of pressure on myself that we're constantly improving, seeing the level to which we've improved so far.

But that second word I'm going to use is just the teaching. I think the learning process that's happened already with these guys. I enjoy the teaching. I think you've seen some real passion from them.

I think if we do the teaching right, then the improvement happens, for sure.

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