

Atlantic Coast Conference Basketball Tipoff Media Day

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Charlotte, North Carolina, USA

Virginia Tech Hokies

Coach Megan Duffy

Alyssa Latham

Carleigh Wenzel

Women's Press Conference



standard and foundation and trying to meet it every single day.

We live on our core values. We try and keep a standard that is hard to reach. As soon as they reach it, we want to put it up a little bit more. I'm really big on just trying to pour into these women as much as I can on and off the court, be consistent with that, really pushing them to their max.

I think that's always been a little bit of staples of my teams is we get the max out of our players. We need to do that this year. That's the biggest thing. Our improvement from now until March is going to be critical to our success.

THE MODERATOR: Carleigh, last season you led the Hokies in scoring and probably one of the most versatile players in the ACC as you ranked in the top 25 in 11 different statistical categories.

You also received All-ACC second team and WBC honorable mention accolades. What is the next step for you, and what are those goals?

CARLEIGH WENZEL: Yeah, just continuing my versatility. My efficiency is one big thing I'll try to take a step on, an elite four. I want to keep the ball bouncing after college, so doing whatever I can to put myself in the best position for whatever comes next.

But also, just being a leader, taking my team to the steps that we want to get to and reaching the goals that we want to obviously achieve. Being my best self, and I want to do a little bit more of my game, but my biggest thing is efficiency.

THE MODERATOR: Alyssa, you've reached the NCAA Tournament every year of your career. Why will that streak continue with this team?

ALYSSA LATHAM: Yeah, I think that with this team we have the pieces that we need to be successful, especially in our post.

Leading the charge in our post group alone with Aniya Trent, I feel like if we do what we need to do as leaders,

THE MODERATOR: Good afternoon and welcome to the ACC Tip Off Q&A. I am happy to welcome the Virginia Tech Hokies to the stage. Head coach Megan Duffy, entering her third season in Blacksburg, Carleigh Wenzel as well as Alyssa Latham.

Welcome.

Megan, your team took the next step last season, finishing 23-10 and reaching the NCAA Tournament. You returned six players from that team. Give me your early season insights on this team and why you can take an even greater step this season.

MEGAN DUFFY: It's been our goal every year to build I say Hokie stone by Hokie stone, continuing to improve. We made a big step with our confidence, with our ability to lay a great foundation for future years.

Carleigh sitting to my left is one of the reasons why we've continued to make steps. I think this team can be even better. I think we have the pieces to be a little bit more athletic inside and be, you know, a team that can protect the rim a little bit better.

I think we have a group of guards that are really unique, led by a few veterans with Carleigh, Samyha Sufferen and Leila Wells, and then you add in some new faces it'll be a good combination. And then we'll talk to Alyssa here in a minute.

THE MODERATOR: Megan, you've averaged 22 wins in your nine years as a head coach. What have been the non-negotiables or fundamental elements to the success?

MEGAN DUFFY: Yeah, I've always been the coach that isn't too much about the glitz and the glam. It's laying that



continue to be vocal, lead the group by example and dominate in the paint, I feel like we can keep that going and do good in tournament.

Q. Coach, what is something about this team that you think people outside the program haven't seen yet but will come to notice?

MEGAN DUFFY: I think with our team I think they're going to be interested in what our new faces look like. I think we went out in not only the portal, but with our freshman class to fill some needs.

Every year teams are blending new faces and trying to get that chemistry, and we're no different. We're working extremely hard right now in this preseason time to lay the foundation of how gritty we're going to be, how tough we're going to be.

We've always believed in playing both sides of the ball. We want to be able to be a great defensive team. We made big strides last year with that, and I think this year we want to really be a little bit more balanced with our offensive prowess, being able to shoot the three a little bit better.

You know, Carleigh along with some of our other guards did a great job of getting to the free-throw line and manufacturing points. I think as Alyssa alluded to, I think we have a great group of posts that are going to be able to contribute in different ways.

Alyssa, for example, is going to be able to score inside. She's go to be able to stretch the defense outside. We have Aniya Trent who got some great minutes as a freshman, and now she's hungry for a different role to be able to help us be successful.

Then obviously you'll hear the name Jessie Dimaro, a young woman from Nigeria coming in who will be a great presence for us inside that will make Alyssa's job easy too.

THE MODERATOR: They definitely agreed with that.

Q. The ACC continues to be one of the deepest conferences in the country. What do you think it will take to compete near the top of this league?

MEGAN DUFFY: The ACC is the best conference in the country, and we're so proud of the historic records we continue to break. To get nine teams in the tournament last year, multiple teams in the Sweet 16, we all have goals to win national championships.

I think what's fantastic about all of us head coaches is we

want to have our teams now, but how we finish in that January, February, March time is what matters the most.

I know we're all driven to get the best talent in the country. We have phenomenal women that are great examples of what college basketball truly is all about. The competition we faced every single night, you got to try and steal road wins, you got to protect your home court. It's the best, and we're so proud and grateful to be a part of it.

It's going to take a lot. I think you have to get a lot of luck. You got to catch a few breaks. You know, you got to make sure you're peaking at the right time, and every team is going to go through a couple of little dips in the road.

But to be able to persevere through hardships during the season and stay connected, there's a lot of teams in our league who can be super successful across the country.

THE MODERATOR: Alyssa, LEGOs.

ALYSSA LATHAM: LEGOs.

THE MODERATOR: LEGOs. What's been the most challenging LEGO creation, and what is the one that you just want so badly to put together? And if it does, does it help you as a basketball player?

ALYSSA LATHAM: Well, one, I would say the hardest one that I did was probably the most recent one. It was like a technic type thing, kind of like a little bit sciency a little bit. I put all them pieces together.

One that I really, really want is this love one. So it's basically the word "love," and it's red and has different colors on it.

THE MODERATOR: Carleigh, you're a rarity in this day and age of college athletics. Four years at Virginia Tech. I read that you chose Virginia Tech because of how they pour into you. Now, as you're going into this fourth year, or last year I should say, how are you a better athlete and person for staying in Blacksburg for four years?

CARLEIGH WENZEL: Yeah, I think I have met some of the greatest people. I was just talking to Liz about this. Not only basketball, but just, like, what I want to do with my career within CIA and FBI, who I have met, who is coaching me, people who have been to where I want to go. I'm just surrounded by everybody that has already done what I want to do in everything in life.

So, yeah, that's definitely, one, why I stayed, but two, what's kind of kept me around. It just keeps me motivated each day, and it's just what makes this place special. I

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

would have never thought coming in the amount of retired CIA and FBI agents that are in Blacksburg, Virginia, but it's something you realize really quickly. The support that's in that town is huge.

THE MODERATOR: Megan, last year you led the ACC in free-throws made, third in steals, and fourth in blocked shots. How did these metrics equate with success that you had and how do you raise the bar in those areas?

MEGAN DUFFY: Yeah, I think after our first year we knew we had to get better defensively. I think there's a lot of different ways you can do it. I think we've relied on our toughness and our grit. You know, our ability to get to the free-throw line was a little bit of our mentality to share the ball, move the ball. It wasn't just Carleigh. It was everybody kind of working off of that.

I think you'll see this year with the combination of Carleigh, Samyha Sufferen, Leila Wells. We'll have that same attack downhill that can manufacture points when you need it sometimes.

Like I mentioned, we'll have some other players that can stretch the floor. It's an exciting brand of basketball. We want to play fast. We want to play gritty. I think we also made some steps last year with executing down the stretch. We went on a big winning streak last year because we were poised down the stretch. We executed. We made big free-throws. Everybody was connected, and that's what we're working on right now.

THE MODERATOR: Carleigh, describe Alyssa's game to the ACC, these fans.

CARLEIGH WENZEL: Extremely versatile. She can guard one through five, and it's not just a stay in front. It's to disrupt. It's to get steals, get deflections, turn the ball over. She can shoot the three. She can shoot the fade-away. She can bring the ball up.

I don't know what she can't do. But yeah, she's just the greatest teammate, greatest person. Obviously there's on the court, but there's off the court too. How she has your back, how she speaks to you, the type of teammate she is and the type of friend she is.

THE MODERATOR: I'll ask you the same thing. What makes Carleigh Wenzel so difficult to guard?

ALYSSA LATHAM: She plays at her own pace. You can't speed her up. Like she said, I'm a disrupter, so when I get on her, I'm trying to turn her over. She just won't. It's really hard to guard her. She's a really great -- she's great at her reads. She knows how to make the right something pass,

but she's a really good scorer.

THE MODERATOR: I'm going to ask each one of you this question, and Alyssa, we'll start with you. Give me one word to describe Virginia Tech women's basketball for this season.

ALYSSA LATHAM: One word to describe VT this season would be dominance.

CARLEIGH WENZEL: Want to give an explanation?

ALYSSA LATHAM: Oh, I got to explain that? Dominance in terms of just being ready every day, being focused, having the mentality of, like, we're going to dominate no matter who is in front of us. We're going to compete every day, every second we step on that step on that court have each other's backs.

CARLEIGH WENZEL: Yeah, I would say relentless. Even if we make mistakes, we're going to come back and learn from them. We're not going to let anything put us out. We're eager to get better, eager to keep getting better game to game, practice to practice. But just continuing to attack the work, continuing to grow.

MEGAN DUFFY: I would say motivated. This has probably been the most motivated group I've been around. They want to be in the gym. They want to be great. They're totally bought into the process it takes to be great, so it's a hungry group of young women.

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