

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship Final Four: LSU vs Virginia Tech

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Virginia Tech Hokies

Kenny Brooks

Semi-Finals Pregame Media Conference



streak, but when we lost to Duke, we learned a lot about ourselves. There was no yelling in the locker room after that game. I told the kids, let this sting. We'll get another opportunity to play them, and I said, don't let it bother us. Let it kick us forward.

From that moment, the look in their eyes, they've been pure professionals. They've gone out, everyone understands their role and they've done them and they've starred in their roles.

The way these kids play for each other is something special. I've never had a group that plays for each other as much as this group does.

**Q. Kenny, last night was the first time you had trailed in the postseason. I know you'd like to just cruise through, but was there a part of you that was curious as to how your team would react, and how would you judge that they did?**

KENNY BROOKS: I mean, obviously the deeper you get into the Tournament, you're playing better teams, and I think it was remarkable that we had gotten to this point without trailing. But Ohio State, they shot the lights out in the first half, and we just kept understanding that we were a half-step slow on some of our coverages in the scheme, and we shored that up in the second half, made the shots a little bit tougher.

But this is a very resilient group. They play possession by possession, game by game. They don't look ahead. They keep their composure, and we talked about keeping composure, particularly in this game because we felt like that Ohio State, their press, there's a lot of talk about their press, and they got on a run, don't lose your composure.

So when we got down, I think we only got down by a few points, maybe three or five, but they kept their composure throughout, and I knew they would, because we have great leadership.

**Q. I've talked to you about building this program, and when you come into Tech and you're recruiting players and you tell them that this is possible, we can get to**

THE MODERATOR: Coach, if you would, just a quick opening statement and we'll go from there.

KENNY BROOKS: If I slur my speech it's because I'm sleepless in Seattle. Have not slept much at all.

Extremely proud of this group for what they've accomplished, and just watching them, it starts with the foundation, Elizabeth Kitley, Georgia Amoore, Taylor Geiman, Cayla King and really transformed the culture of this program, and we've been able to build off of that, and to see the culmination of work come to this, it's just an unbelievable feeling for me because I know how hard they work.

They represent our program but also our university to the utmost, and they're not just great basketball players, they're great people, and with the additions that we've had with Kayana Traylor and Taylor Soule, their sacrifice, their willingness to sacrifice, to get to this moment means everything as a coach and watching them celebrate, and it just means everything to me.

So very happy with this group. We've gone through, we've been playing really good basketball the last couple months, and we just want to continue it on in Dallas.

**Q. Just talk about this year with your team. When did you know that you had a great team? When did you see them all come together?**

KENNY BROOKS: This summer. I knew we had the talent this summer, and watching them and how quickly they were starting to gel. They weren't a cohesive unit during the summer, but we knew we had the makings of it just because we had so many mature kids.

And then really we hit our stride obviously with the winning



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**this level, what does it mean to you and to these players to actually reach this point? They've got trust in you that you can help guide them there. What does this mean to you to get to this point?**

KENNY BROOKS: Well, it means everything. I mean, it's kind of like being a parent. You tell your kids if they act the right way, good things will happen to them. Same thing in recruiting. Aisha Sheppard was my first recruit. I sold her a vision. It was a blind vision because we didn't have anything to say, hey, look, this is what we do, it was look, this is what we're going to do. I told Aisha Sheppard, I'm going to get players in here like you, I'm going to get people in here like you, and together we're going to build this and we're going to build it to where we're winning ACC Championships.

She took a blind leap of faith. Elizabeth Kitley took a blind leap of faith. Georgia Amore took a blind leap of faith and trusted in me that if they did the things I told them to do, that everything would come to fruition. For me it's exciting to watch them experience it.

It really hasn't sunk in to me yet what this will mean for me, but I'm sitting back and enjoying watching the kids embracing and all the hugs and their thank yous for helping them get here, but I'm sitting back watching them, relishing in their happiness to get here because of their sacrifices.

**Q. Us locally, we see the greatness of this team, but for now, the nation will recognize and see what this team is doing. How special is it that people get to hear all these special stories that we all know and respect on your team?**

KENNY BROOKS: It's a lot because we are a very interesting basketball team. We have a lot of stories. They come from a lot of different places to melt into one unit, which is tremendous in itself.

Like you said, locally we get really good coverage and people get to know our kids. I think they express themselves through podcasts and things of that nature, but now the whole world gets to hear their stories. Not only see them play and watch them play and how great they are on the basketball court, but they get to hear their stories because they're very interesting, and that's great for our program. It's great for our university because these kids epitomize everything we want from student-athletes but also student-athletes that represent Virginia Tech.

**Q. Now that you're heading to Dallas, you're a Cowboys fan, I know you're going to let the Cowboys know, hey, come see you and all that.**

KENNY BROOKS: Hey, you know what, I was back there, I can't remember the year, but the last time it was in Dallas, Mississippi State was playing UConn, and I remember right across -- not right across the aisle, but I could see him, Dak Prescott was there rooting for Mississippi State. That was a surreal moment.

But my surreal moment was last night. I'm not really a fan boy and I have people that I like, and Georgia Amore had her moment yesterday when Sue Bird was tweeting at her, and my moment yesterday was when Earvin Magic Johnson was tweeting at me and congratulating the team. That was a really cool moment.

Obviously there's perks with coming to the Final Four, and we're going to make sure our kids really enjoy it. They're professional enough that they'll get down to business, but we want them to really enjoy it.

**Q. I know Will Sims had a big hand in the scout yesterday. He went and did the postgame radio with Evan. What has he meant to the group, and I know he's not necessarily an assistant coach, he's not somebody who gets a lot of the spotlight, but what was his role in that, and what did you like so much? I know you talked about how you've got the best staff in the country. What did you like so much about his ability and how he carried out everything yesterday and all season long?**

KENNY BROOKS: Him, just like the rest of my staff, they're rising stars. They're tremendous. He's got an opportunity to step up and do more. We were short an assistant all year long, and he's gotten to step in, and did some scouts. He actually had this scout. He had the Louisville scout and the ACC championship game. And they rotate their scouts, and the way it all fell, it fell that ACC championship game, it was his team. I never wavered. I didn't say, hey, this moment might be too big for him, somebody else do it.

He's done a tremendous job all year, and I've been very proud of him, and he stepped up and gave a tremendous scout last night. We didn't waver, because Coach Hicks was supposed to be UConn, so he would have Ohio State. I think everybody in the world thought it was going to be UConn. And when it was his opportunity, he stepped up.

He's very thorough, he's very prepared. I liken him to a little young Shawn Poppie. He just knows his stuff. He really does, and he did a tremendous job, and he's been great for us all year long.

**Q. Have you and Kim Mulkey talked to each other? I know we talked a little bit last night about just what the**

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**full circle moment is like.**

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah.

**Q. Have you exchanged words with her yet?**

KENNY BROOKS: No, not yet, but I'm sure she'll embrace me and in her own way she's going to be very welcoming.

But the full circle moment with Coach Mulkey, I love Kim, I love the way she goes about her business. She's a little bit more fiery than I am and her clothes are a little bit louder than mine but we still are old-school basketball coaches. The way she gets after her kids, I just love watching her perform.

Three years ago when she was at Baylor, and they whipped us, they whipped us good, behind her mask she gave me a vote of confidence, some encouragement. She said, behind that mask, Kenny, I know you're smiling. Today we played as good as we could play, but you just have babies, and you're going to be good. She was referencing Georgia Amore, Elizabeth Kitley, Cayla King and those guys. She patted me on the chest and she said, you're going to be good, good luck to you, so on, so forth.

We've exchanged pleasantries on the recruiting trail. She's someone that I admire. I've coached against her I think two times - once at Virginia Tech and once at James Madison. She's a legend in this game, and it's going to be a lot of fun going against her again.

**Q. You mentioned earlier that Magic Johnson had tweeted at you and Sue Bird had tweeted at Georgia. A lot of Virginia Tech fans on Twitter last night were comparing this Final Four run to 1999 and the football team going to the National Championship game. Do you at any point allow yourself to think what this means in the bigger picture of Virginia Tech athletics, or is that for another time?**

KENNY BROOKS: It's probably for another time. Right now it's just really locked in on the task at hand. Locked in on what it means to our players, because of all the hard work that they've put in.

Typical 2023, locked in on what it can do for us recruiting. Obviously the transfer portal is popping right now, and we look great because we're only one of four teams still playing in the NCAA Tournament.

I think there's going to be time when I'm sitting at home on my dock at my lake house reminiscing. That's when it'll probably hit me and what it's done. But there's no doubt in my mind that Hokie nation is extremely proud of the girls

and what they've done and some positivity that we've brought to the university.

**Q. You've been to Final Fours before; did you ever allow yourself to think what it might be like to coach in one of these games? I know you talked to Howie last night about now you're going to get to take your whole family back there to watch you coach in a Final Four game. Did you ever allow yourself to think about what that experience might be like?**

KENNY BROOKS: You know what, it's such an honor to do it. Very few people get to do it, unless you're Geno. But no, I've always thought it would be cool. I thought it would be really cool because I've gone to the open practices where everyone is around and they get to watch you, and we all want to grab a piece of what somebody who's been that successful, what they're doing.

For me now we'll come to the open practice and there will be people watching and thinking the same thing. So it's a very cool moment.

What I love about actually just being here is that we have a group that the moment is not too big. They're very mature. They understand it. They're cohesive, and I'm looking forward to them getting on that stage so their story can be told. But it's definitely going to be something that is going to sink in much later for the bigger picture, but right now we're just really locked in on what it means to this group of kids and recruiting.

**Q. I know the regional format this year with the two regional sites, it looked like great attendance in Seattle. I'd love to take your take on the experience just being there at the regional site.**

KENNY BROOKS: It was awesome. I didn't know what to expect when obviously UConn and Tennessee, they weren't in it, and both teams that were in it were thousands of miles away from their home venues. I was extremely proud of Hokie nation and their representation, the way they came out to Seattle to represent.

Someone asked me earlier, they said, do you like this format, or would you like to keep it -- play it at homesites, and I told them, I said, let me experience this first because what I've just come off of was watching a sold out Cassell Coliseum for two games and a rowdy crowd behind us and an experience that the girls will never forget. Because we've been to some first-round games, second-round games. We've played in COVID where there's no one there. You understand the magnitude of the game, but you don't feel the energy because no one is there.



What our kids have been able to experience this year with the sold-out crowds, two games in a row at Cassell, that energy, and that coming here, the people in Seattle have been tremendous. NCAA put on a first-class tournament experience. The arena is beautiful, the way the people were great, they ushered us through like it was a big-time event.

My kids got to sit in the Seattle Storm's locker room and hang out for a little while. And then when we walked out, the energy in that building, the crowd in that building, you knew it was something special. You knew it was for something pretty big. The energy was just tremendous. It's something that I'll never forget. I know our kids will never forget it.

I'd have to say I like this format, the way that it is, and I hope we can just continue to get a top 4 seed. I know they're going to change the whole situation, but this has been a dream come true for our program and everyone involved in it.

**Q. You mentioned being sleepless in Seattle; how much sleep did you actually get last night, if any, and did you hear from anybody in Waynesboro? How many of your people back home were contacting you after that win last night?**

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, honestly, no joke, I think I've slept about two hours, and I think that was because I nodded off, and I woke right back up.

I don't think people back home, East Coast, just period, know that we're three hours behind them, so my phone is buzzing, going like crazy probably starting here like 3:00, 4:00 in the morning.

Yes, I've heard from a lot of people from everywhere, whether it's back home, JMU or Waynesboro or Blacksburg, everywhere. A lot of people are sitting back and watching.

In another cool moment, when I got handed the trophy to raise it up, it was a fellow JMU alum who I went to school with. We were in school at the same time. We just feel like there's support everywhere, and the people back in Waynesboro, Harrisonburg, everywhere, they're really supporting us.

**Q. Do you think this Final Four, obviously there's no UConn for the first time in 14 years, but you've got Coach Staley, undefeated team looking to repeat, Coach Mulkey has a National Championship, Caitlin Clark, Virginia Tech is a top seed newcomer. Is this a Final Four that can either further showcase the sport?**

KENNY BROOKS: Oh, absolutely. There's star power. There's star power all throughout the Tournament. I think ESPN has done a tremendous job. I think the coverage for women's basketball has done a tremendous job to make Caitlin Clark -- she's made it herself, but to recognize her and now she's a household name.

You look at Aliyah Boston, she's a household name, Dawn Staley is a household name, Kim Mulkey is a household name. Now we're getting the opportunity to put our kids, Elizabeth Kitley, Georgia Amoore, put them on that same stage, and I think the way the game is being played, you watch our game last night against Ohio State, that was a high-level basketball game. It was a fun game. It was back and forth, it was a lot of shot-making going on. If you didn't enjoy that, I know there's some naysayers about women's basketball, if you didn't enjoy that, you're just a hater. You're not a basketball fan. I even had to take a moment and think -- I had a little smile.

Somebody asked me during the game, one of the reporters, they said, we saw you smiling a little bit during the game, and I was like, because Mikesell was making some tough shots, Georgia was making some tough shots, and that was entertaining as heck.

I think it's tremendous for women's basketball. The teams that will be represented, the storylines that will be represented, and if you just really dive into it, you're going to really enjoy what's going on.

**Q. Looking at the entire field over the course of the tournament, all of the upsets to No. 1s, Indiana and Stanford, and then seeing the Elite 8 and the Final Four teams that -- your first-timers or teams that haven't been here since before these kids were born, what is your take on that as far as parity in the field and how you fit into it also, coming from a mid-major now to Virginia Tech? What are your thoughts on that as far as parity in the game?**

KENNY BROOKS: Well, I think you're exactly right. I think it's needed. I've always said, women's basketball is probably about five years behind men's basketball in some of the trends, and now with the transfer portal, the utilization of the transfer portal, you're going to see more parity. Case in point, you look at the men's Final Four, San Diego State and Florida Atlantic, those are teams that are in there, and there have been teams like that before them that have made the Final Four, VCU's, the George Masons, the Butlers. Now you get an opportunity.

And I know we're a power 5 school, but you're starting to get more and more opportunities because kids are





transferring and they're transferring wanting a new opportunity and wanting maybe a chance to play, and some of those players are really, really good. If you can get a collection of kids to be able to come in and they can transform your program really, really quick.

For me as a coach, I've had to look at it differently. When you try to look at other teams and see what they have, normally you're like, okay, they have this kid, she's a freshman, she's coming back, she's a sophomore. Now you can transform your team into a contender overnight because of the transfer portal.

So it's going to be different. I think you're going to continue to see different names. Not that I think UConn has gone away or Tennessee has gone away. They definitely have their opportunities, as well, but I wouldn't be surprised in the years to come if there's a newcomer all the time.

I think it makes it exciting for women's basketball because it's going to add the element of unpredictability, and I think that's what fans like. Fans get tired of -- they get fatigued of the same teams all the time, but the interest will get drummed up if there's a new kid on the block, and I think we're the new kid on the block right now, relatively speaking because of history, and people will tune in and be excited. Maybe they'll get behind us because sometimes I think people forget that we were the 1 seed. So these aren't upsets. We're not surprised to be here.

**Q. I saw Liz and Cayla were walking down the hallway after the game with a big cardboard sign. Did that make it on the bus okay?**

KENNY BROOKS: You know a lot of things made it on the bus and I don't know how we're going to get on the plane. Tim Clark is my chief of staff and he will find a way. I told him my man cave has a lot of empty walls that need to be decorated. So I'm sure he'll find a way to get all that material back.

**Q. Speaking of Tim, I joked with him yesterday, I asked him, I was like, you've been around Kenny and these programs for a really long time. Have you ever seen a more locked-in team, and he said no. Why do you think this group is just so locked in? You've coached a lot of teams at JMU that had a lot of success, now some at Tech. Why is this group so constantly locked in? It seems like nothing really ever fazes them.**

KENNY BROOKS: The leadership is on display in full effect. These kids have been with me and they understand me. They know me. I know them, they know me. People ask me a lot and say, you don't yell a lot. I said I don't

have to. I just look at them, and the kids tell me I have a dad look. So if I just look at them a certain way, they're, okay, it's time to get down to business.

I don't know if I could count on two hands if I raised my voice all year at them. It's just more conversations because they're so professional, and they're smart.

When I tell you that -- a lot of people can look at things and it motivates them but it motivates them angrily. They want to say, hey, hey, we proved you wrong. These kids don't want to prove you wrong, they want to prove themselves right, and they listen to all the naysayers. When we came out, we were a No. 1 seed and so many people on social media were like, they're the weakest No. 1 seed. They'll be the first No. 1 seed knocked out. Well, they can't do it. They only play six people or seven people. They're going to get bounced out when they face this team.

Our kids read it all. In this day and age it's really unrealistic for me to say don't read it. But what they've done, they've read it, and it's fueled them in a very positive way. When people doubt them personally, when people doubt their ability to go out and play, when people always have something to say, they're like, Coach, we're 31-4 and they're still talking. I'm like, all right, just keep listening and let it continue to fuel you the way it has. You don't see them going back at anything or getting into a Twitter argument or whatever. It just fuels in the right way.

I'm very proud of them for that. Their maturity, I think that's part of what helps them lock in on the court, and I have not -- our rotation is six or seven because that six or seven, they are one. They are locked in and on both ends of the floor, emotionally, physically, and it's a thing of beauty and something I've never experienced before.

**Q. To have all of the players' families and stuff, everybody that was there last night, obviously you got to experience a lot of that in Greensboro, but just time and time again, I know you see the Kitleys, the Kings, just the families, the Amoores are obviously going to be in Dallas. Why have these players' families meant so much to you? I know they're so important.**

KENNY BROOKS: People don't understand especially in this day and age, that the importance of a supportive family support group -- because everything doesn't always go your way. So what happens when things don't go your way. With that core group, I have their full support. They're hugging me, thanking me for what I've done for their daughters. We're all crying. I'm hugging them, thanking them for allowing me to coach their daughters and believing in me and trusting in me.



It's just a tremendous feeling because in this day and age, a lot of things can get individualized. Some people want their kids to play no matter what, whether you win or lose, they just want their kid to play. These families that were on that floor last night, they just want our kids to win, and they share in everyone's successes, whether it's Taylor Geiman's parents, and maybe Taylor doesn't play as much, or maybe it's Elizabeth Kitley's parents, who Liz gets all the glory. They all love it the same; they just know they're on this ride to be able to win, and you can't do it unless you have that support.

I thank them. I love them. I appreciate them, and without their support, their unwavering support, we wouldn't be able to be here today, and that's how you build a program. That's what you call culture.

It's not for everyone. I'm no saint, and it's not for everyone. But if you're willing to sacrifice and accept your role and star in your role, then beautiful things like this can happen.

**Q. You talked about just that six- or seven-man rotation, and you see 95 percent of your points come from your starters. How do you manage to keep that core group clicking on all cylinders?**

KENNY BROOKS: You know what, it's a lot. I have a tremendous training staff, I have a tremendous strength and conditioning coach, and it's a wonderful collaboration. They do a tremendous job.

We work our kids, and we push them, but being a veteran coach, I know when it's time to pull back, and we start to train their minds just as much as their bodies. So that we can save some of the ground and pound on their legs.

We've got some veteran kids who logged a lot of minutes. I've got five 1,000-point scorers on my team, another one who's going to become one next year. They're so smart, we don't have to go out there for a three and a half hour practice every day to get to what we need to get to. We'll go out there, we'll practice, we do things we have to do. They're very efficient, and we've probably been doing this for the last month where we come in and we're almost like a WNBA team or NBA team and we really condition their minds as much as we do their bodies. They stay in shape; they lift and do some stuff like that, but we don't have to have the three-hour practices where they're grinding it out, and I think that's really helped us.

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