

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Virginia vs Georgia

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Iowa City, Iowa, USA

Carver-Hawkeye Arena

Virginia Cavaliers

Coach Amaka

Agugua-Hamilton

Sa'Myah Smith

Kymora Johnson

Media Conference

Virginia 82, Georgia 73 (OT)

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Virginia coach Amaka Agugua-Hamilton and the student-athletes. We'll take an opening statement from Coach and then questions for student-athletes. Coach, congratulations.

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: First of all, I was kind of emotional in the locker room because I'm just so proud of our players. I'm so proud of our group, our staff, everybody. We've been through a lot this season. There's been a lot of ups and downs, a lot of people that counted us out. And we just stayed together, and we knew what we had and were clicking at the right time.

There was a lot of adversity in that game and we had to fight to push it to overtime and then also to do what we did in overtime. Once we got to overtime, we knew it was our game. We came out with a lot of urgency.

Proud of this group. Proud of these two. Today they were phenomenal. And then also Georgia played a great game. I have a lot of respect for Coach Abe. A very good friend of mine and well-coached team. They had a great year.

You hate to take out one of your friends, but it's about us, and I'm excited that we're still here.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. What was the key in overtime? It seemed like you really took control early in the overtime. What was the



key?

KYMORA JOHNSON: Fight. I mean, we came back, tied the game up. And I know that going into that, a lot of us were tired. And we had a long stretch of trying to come back and getting back in the game.

But once we did, all we were talking about in the huddle before overtime was fight. Fight. Nothing is promised, so fight for tomorrow.

SA'MYAH SMITH: Just piggybacking off of what Mo said, fighting for one more every day, every day that we play. So fighting for each other, fighting for this team. I mean, yeah.

Q. It appeared that as the Iowa crowd came filtering in, they were really pulling for you. Could you feel that? And how did that fuel you?

KYMORA JOHNSON: Yeah, that was really cool. Iowa gets a lot of fans, and it was really cool to see the stadium fill up. Although it was very hot.

We saw them at our hotel too. A couple of them were at the sendoff, cheering us on. We really appreciate the respect.

Q. Sa'Myah, do you feel like that was your best game in a Virginia uniform? And talk about potentially saving the best for the most important game of the season?

SA'MYAH SMITH: If it was my best game, then I saved it for the right time. No better time to do it than now. Win or go home.

Q. Kymora, you were pretty emotional after the win the other night. You got your composure today. Are you just mentally focused now that you know you've earned your spot, now it's a fight every day, like she said?

KYMORA JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, this group just held me together. When I came in the locker room, I knew I



didn't need to be teary-eyed. Honestly, all of that was happy tears. I'm just proud to be able to put Charlottesville back on the map, a place where I'm from, where I grew up.

And this team is so bought in, and they've helped me do it, and we got it back to where they used to be. And we're just going to keep going and keep fighting.

Q. You went scoreless the second half, and then you got five big points in overtime. What kind of got you going there in the overtime?

SA'MYAH SMITH: I didn't want to lose. This team is not done yet. Just like Mo said, we're fighting, fighting every game. So I'm just doing what I have to do to help my team win.

Q. Kymora, can you just touch on how you were able to produce so consistently even through the double and triple teams?

KYMORA JOHNSON: This team. I mean, they had my back. They were getting open when I was getting double and triple teamed. They cut to the ball. They found me when I was open, and I found them when they were open. And they believe in me. And when the ball was in my hands, I took the shots when I needed to and then dished out when I needed to. So yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Ladies, you can head out now. Congratulations, and we'll see you tomorrow. Questions for Coach now.

Q. Can you talk about the tactics in the second half of how you deployed that man-to-man defense and really stifled them, especially in the homestretch of the fourth quarter? Just talk about that decision to mix the defense up on them.

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Yeah, I mean, we've been playing quite a bit of zone lately. And it's been helping us. But they were doing a great job of getting in places in the zone where it's hard to guard. And they were isolating our bigs a little bit in the corners, and we were slow to get out there. And they were shooting shots, and we were fouling them and things like that.

It helped us early. I thought we had some good rotations. But then once they started to pick it apart, we had to go to man-to-man defense and just had high urgency.

But we always prepare. We prepare for both. Soon as we went to man-to-man, our players knew exactly what we were going to do. If zone is not working, if people are shooting you out of the zone, you've got to be able to make

an adjustment.

Q. The three-point shooting, not only Mo, but what Romi has been giving you recently, seems like she's gone to another level of confidence in the last month. Have you witnessed that?

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Yeah, Romi is an X factor for us. She can do so much for us. She's 6'3", she's a guard, she plays the top of that zone. So she's disruptive out there. But she can rebound, she can shoot. She's kind of like a Swiss Army knife.

So when she's playing confident and urgent like she is, it helps our team. She's now in her last season of eligibility, and she doesn't want it to be over. And so sometimes when you get seniors that are playing with that kind of urgency, it can be scary for the other team.

Q. I asked you about having a sense of freedom after getting that first game under your belt, that first win back on Thursday. Did you witness that out on the floor today, not quite the physical defensive grind that Thursday was, but it seemed like the team was just playing really free on offense and shooting without (indiscernible). Did you witness that today?

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Yeah, Georgia is a great defensive team. So I think it was pretty physical. Both games were physical. Which we expected.

But there's something to say about getting a game under our belt. I talked to them about that. When we played against Arizona State, we didn't shoot the ball well, they took us out of a lot of our actions, we had some nerves, just anxious energy.

You get a game under your belt, you relax, understand we belong here. And then we played more free, like you said. But that was the message to our team. What I wrote on the board was *carpe diem*, seize the day. Let's stay present, let's enjoy this, but we're going to continue to fight for one more day with this group, one more game, one more day, one at a time.

Q. Congratulations. I just wanted to ask how you are able to translate what you've gotten from these two games into just some sort of momentum going into the next game?

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Thank you. We just got to continue to stay present. I think you take everything one game at a time. Each scout has been completely different. These scouts will be different, and we've just got to stay locked in.

Most important thing is I want our team to enjoy this journey. You play your whole season to make it to the Big Dance. And we want to take -- we don't want to take any moments for granted. We just want to have fun with each other, stay locked in.

But when we're focusing on the game plan and we're focusing on the scout, we've got to lock in. But outside of that, enjoy each other. This is a blessing to be here. All the glory goes to God. I usually start that way. But we just don't want to take any of it for granted or miss out on celebrating any moments.

So we'll get ready for whoever we're going to play. They're about to play right now. But we're going to enjoy this. We're going to enjoy this for at least a couple more minutes, because it was a great win for our program.

Q. Sa'Myah opened the game, she made her first eight shots. What got her going in the first half?

AMAKA AGUGUA-HAMILTON: Sa'Myah is a winner. And she didn't like her performance the first game against Arizona State. And actually I talked to her at pregame meal and was like, You ready? You ready to bounce back? And she was like, I got you. Can I count on you? I got you.

It was different. She had a different look in her eyes. And he she was ready to get back on the court. She didn't want Arizona State to be the last time she stepped on the court and didn't perform up to her potential.

I knew when she said that and she looked in my eyes, she was like, No, I'm ready. I got you. It was going to be a different Sa'Myah out there.

And from the jump, she was ready. Those were big shots they were playing all of her. She was able to help us play one-on-one inside because they were playing off both our bigs. She started hitting 15 footers, and now you've got to come out and play. She made some good decisions as well. Had some big rebounds.

Just really proud of her. She's -- her story of resilience, I would be remiss I didn't bring that up, is one that really touches your heart. She's been here since May, and right when she got here in May, she had a knee surgery. Tried to fight back from that, and then had another one right before the season and missed the first eight or nine games or so.

She was playing great, kind of like this, for about three games, and then her mother passed away. And that

derailed her obviously. You can understand that. When she started trying to get back from that, then her grandfather passed away. It's just been a lot for her. Every time she turns around, something is happening.

I'm just super proud of her. There were times where she was like, I don't even know if I can do this anymore. She was just fighting for her team, fighting for this coaching staff, fighting for this university. She came here for the reason. Helped us get back to the tournament.

So I couldn't be more proud of her, and I just want her to stay present. That's what I told her. Don't get too hard on yourself, you've been through a lot, and we're all proud of you.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, congratulations. Thank you.

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