

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

Friday, March 17, 2023

Blacksburg, Virginia, USA

Cassell Coliseum

Chattanooga Mocs

Shawn Poppie

Yazz Wazeerud-Din

Abbey Cornelius

Media Conference

Virginia Tech - 58, Chattanooga - 33

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by the Chattanooga Mocs, Head Coach Shawn Poppie, Abbey Cornelius, and Yazz Wazeerud-Din.

We'll take an opening statement from Coach Poppie.

SHAWN POPPIE: I'm super proud of this group. The two seniors that I have sitting up here, everything they poured into us, the kids we have in that locker room.

It's a sad day. It's a sad day because it's a group that I love dearly. They've poured everything into our new staff in our first year and given everything they possibly could.

Tonight Virginia Tech was a better team. They're a really good basketball team over there. We knew coming in that we had our hands full. I thought we did a really good job at times defensively, and apparently so did they. They were stifling. It's hard to get good looks. The ones we did get, we couldn't get into any runs. We couldn't put anything together.

So congratulations to Coach Brooks and Virginia Tech, and we wish them nothing but the best. But love this group we have and so proud of what they've done for us.

THE MODERATOR: Let's open it up to questions for the student-athletes.

Q. For the players, to follow up on that, what about Tech's defense made it a tough shooting night for you guys?



YAZZ WAZEERUD-DIN: I don't think it was anything special. They were pressuring. We just had to shoot it with confidence. Go in shooting like -- what did we shoot? 28 percent. That's not us. So I guess they did good pressure, and we just didn't shoot it with confidence.

Q. Abbey, was having to deal with Kitley's height, was that a problem for you, for example?

ABBEY CORNELIUS: Yeah, that probably affected me a little bit. We don't play any 6'6" players on a regular basis. So that definitely did play a factor.

Q. For the players, you guys held Tech -- defensively for you guys, you guys held Tech at times, really stifled them, forced a lot of turnovers. What did you like at moments that you guys did, and what made it so hard to sustain defensively at times?

YAZZ WAZEERUD-DIN: I liked how like when it was time to fight on Kitley, like we did, and we executed that game plan.

I feel like at times we didn't execute, and that hurt us, and they made us pay. So that's really about it.

Q. How much did the crowd affect you guys? Did that have any factor in how you guys were shooting or how you were playing defense or anything like that? Just in general, how much did that crowd affect your play today?

ABBEY CORNELIUS: I think it just affected how much we could hear each other, but that environment was great, and it was a blast to play in.

Q. The Hokies went on a 14-0 run in that first and second quarter, and it wasn't for lack of trying for some of those shots you guys had, they just weren't falling. How frustrating was it to just not have those fall and try and stay locked in?

ABBEY CORNELIUS: It's always frustrating when the other team is knocking down shots and you're getting good



looks and they're not falling. So that was frustrating. We just had to rebound better. I felt like we did a better job coming out of timeouts and just fighting together.

Q. For both of you, you guys are both seniors. Abbey, you've been here forever. Yazz, I know this was your first year here. But what are you guys going to remember most about being Chattanooga Mocs?

YAZZ WAZEERUD-DIN: Just the team and the bonds that I built with my teammates and coaches. It was a fun ride.

ABBEY CORNELIUS: A lot. From the teams I've had, the coaches I've had, our fans, it's just a big family. I will never forget my time here.

THE MODERATOR: Head coach Shawn Poppie. Questions for coach.

Q. Shawn, you've known Georgia for a really long time. What has impressed you so much over the years about how she's continued to get better? She's still got a couple years left. What about tonight and the way she's playing this season is just so tough for you guys to defend? Not just you guys, but every team that Tech's come up against.

SHAWN POPPIE: Yeah, everybody. First and foremost, I think you answered some of the question yourself. She continues to get better. She's such a humble kid. It's been fun this year watching from afar. She just continues to get better.

She continues to spend time in the gym obviously with Coach Brooks and his philosophy. I've been there, seen that. The amount of times they watch film together, it just continues on.

What makes her so hard to guard is that, first and foremost, she can score at all three levels, and she's got such a pace to herself that it's hard to -- I mean, we were trying to funnel her into areas tonight to try to get her to shoot twos because she's so deadly with her little step-back. She can hit you with so many different -- she can play in transition. She can play on the ball screen. They've added some stuff to play her out of some staggered screens. You just can't lose any kind of focus on her.

She hit a three to start the fourth quarter. We knew the play call. We know what's coming, and she still gets a wide open three. That's how special she is.

So I'm proud of her. She obviously hurt us tonight. I'm excited to watch her continue this run in the NCAA

Tournament.

Q. Going back to what about Tech's defense made it a tough shooting night for you guys?

SHAWN POPPIE: Yeah, and I know it was frustrating for these two that were up here because they wanted it so bad. I was here. I know the philosophy. We have very similar philosophy where we're at.

They put so much pressure on you to shoot contested jump shots mostly off the dribble. Any screening actions, they're there on the catch. Obviously they funnel you inside to Kitley, which presents a huge problem. If you don't have a kid that can stretch the floor as a five, then she can kind of sit back in there.

What it does is it forces you to beat them one-on-one off the dribble, and that's not how we're built. So I felt like the one chance we had was to shoot behind some ball screens, which I think that was the frustrating thing with Yazz that was up here, that she felt like she got good looks. And I think some of the size and length we don't see on a regular basis.

I think -- and this is kind of probably long winded, but back to an earlier question about the crowd. We struggled getting play calls to all be on the same page. So there's a lot of possessions where four of our kids are in something, and the fifth kid, and how we play, we need all five. So that would throw us out of rhythm.

For a game like this, you have to be all on the same page, and we have to execute with -- because we just run so much stuff to try to manufacture points.

Q. In terms of your defense, Liz only took six shots today, made four. What was kind of the defensive game plan against Liz?

SHAWN POPPIE: We sent a double every time she caught it. That's what -- I think you heard the word fire. That's what we call our double-team, fire. Any time she caught it, we were trying to run people at her.

Obviously playing her one-on-one, I didn't think we had any chance. The thing with them, sometimes people don't do it because you're trading twos for the ability for them to shoot threes.

Again, I thought for the most part we did a pretty solid job defensively. With that said, it's kind of been our same story all year. We manage possessions. So we knew we couldn't stop them if they had 75 possessions, but we thought, if we could keep them into the -- actually, our goal

was low 50s.

So to have 48 and a handful of free throws, we were right there. But you can't shoot 28 percent against them and think you have a chance.

Q. Shawn, I was wondering if you could maybe share a little of what Kenny told you after the game. What's maybe the biggest takeaway you took from him as you wrap up your first season as a head coach?

SHAWN POPPIE: The little handshake is just I love you, and I love you too. That man means so much to me and my family. For what he's done to help me as a coach, but really, to be honest with you, as a father, to be a husband and manage it inside this business.

He obviously is excited for us as we're going to have baby number three any moment. Hopefully my phone hasn't went off.

And then he's just proud of me. I believe he's right. He said your kids competed your tails off, and we did. We just didn't have it today.

As far as what I've learned the most, it's relationships, how he does -- he's just a genuine human being that has true relationships with anyone that comes in contact with him, especially his players. I think what happens is it's a true love so you can coach them hard, you can love on them hard, and they continue to get better and better and better, and that's what you see out there. It's just amazing what he's done.

Q. I know today obviously didn't go the way you guys had hoped, but a 20-win season, SoCon title. How would you assess year one, and what do you think about the future of this program?

SHAWN POPPIE: You know, a lot of people would say we overachieved. 11 months ago, I would have said it too when I first took the job.

With that said, we created a lot of momentum. This group has bought into our culture, how we do things, how we operate, and what you saw tonight is really an example of that. They're going to compete, and they're going to trust. I think we've laid a foundation and probably skipped some steps, to be honest with you.

To think that we're here in year one, I think we skipped some steps, and now we've got to continue to build off of it. I told them in the locker room, remember this week. Remember getting our name called, that feeling in front of our home fans. Remember how they were treated all week

leading up to here.

Don't maybe remember this moment in the sense of a loss, but what I mean by that is because this has to push us forward. This spring and workouts, this summer, we've created a culture this is what we do here. So we've got to use it and springboard us forward because I do think that we've skipped some steps.

THE MODERATOR: Coach Poppie, all the best to you on baby number three and safe travels home.

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