

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - South Dakota State vs Virginia Tech

Saturday, March 18, 2023

Blacksburg, Virginia, USA

Cassell Coliseum

Virginia Tech Hokies

Kenny Brooks

Georgia Amoore

Kayana Traylor

Media Conference

Q. What has the past couple hours been like for you in terms of scout and what sticks out to you about South Dakota State and how amped are you to play in front of a sold out crowd?

GEORGIA AMOORE: During practice we went through the plays. The fundamentally sound. They have a few girls -- they're very persistent in their actions, strong, tough. A lot of it was just getting familiar with the plays and going back over them later.

KAYANA TRAYLOR: A lot of what Georgia said, but I think our big focus is just ourselves really. We are just going to play our game and make them play to us rather than vice versa.

Q. Georgia, you had quite a game yesterday. How do you hope to carry that momentum into the second round now?

GEORGIA AMOORE: I think no matter what, it's that time of year where you have to do anything to win. So I'm not really too focused on like how great I played yesterday or whatever. Just going into tomorrow's game, it's so important to just play together and connected and everyone has to be the best they can because they're a good team.

Q. What's it like playing in front of that home crowd? South Dakota State has a huge advantage when they play in the Summit League that they won to get here. There's usually 10,000 Jackrabbit fans cheering them



for and the other teams in the league hate playing in front of that. You know you are going to get that tomorrow. How much does that help your game?

KAYANA TRAYLOR: I think it's exciting. I think both for Virginia Tech and women's basketball in general, I think to have a crowd like that and obviously it helps tremendously energy wise, so definitely looking forward it.

GEORGIA AMOORE: It was incredible yesterday, and I'm even more excited to see what they bring tomorrow because the more fans, the more is at stake and more energy and emotion that plays into it. I'm very excited for the crowd tomorrow.

Q. Can't that help both teams? I mean, grant there's 9,000 people cheering against you, but when it's loud and energy, I'm guessing a competitive person rises to that, don't they?

GEORGIA AMOORE: I would say our student section is a bit ruthless sometimes. So I wouldn't want back on the back end of what they're saying sometimes.

KAYANA TRAYLOR: No. Just what she said in general, but it's I think vice versa like whenever we play in front of big crowds, it's always nice to like make them real quiet. It could go both ways.

Q. Coach Brooks describes your offensive as a little vanilla, and not revealing too much. Do you guys get a sense you will have to open it more today or just moving forward maybe?

KAYANA TRAYLOR: Can you repeat the question?

Q. Just yesterday Coach Brooks described your guys' offense as, you know, just running kind of just the vanilla sets and stuff and not opening up too much to reveal, you know, for this game. Do you get the sense you will need to open the play book a little more?

KAYANA TRAYLOR: Yeah. I think so. South Dakota State plays really good defense as far as like team defense and kind of packing in the paint. So we are definitely --



yeah, but again I just think it's about us offensively. I think if we are hitting shots, it's going to open the floor.

Q. Defensively for you guys, you guys have just been -- that's really been the difference maker. You are stepping up on defense on this 12 game win streak. South Dakota State has a really good offense. What kind of not only stands out about them, but also what you guys need to bring defensively?

GEORGIA AMOORE: I think at the end of the day, it just is up to us and how physical we play both on the offense and defense. We have to match that physicality and even exceed to win.

Q. What's it like to play a mid-major that seems unopposed by you guys?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Can you repeat the second part of that question, please?

Q. They don't seem afraid of anyone.

GEORGIA AMOORE: Oh, no. Mid-major, no. Mid-major are good teams. I think every mid-major, they're good teams. They have that team aspect that when they go out, the throw haymakers. They play with a level of aggression and a desire to win. They have a great desire to win. And I don't -- you know, the term mid-major, I think it has a negative connotation, but they're strong teams.

KAYANA TRAYLOR: I think especially at this time of the year, it doesn't really matter to be honest. Everybody wants to win. Everybody wants to compete. So we know it's going to be a tough game. We know it's going to be a battle. We are looking forward to it.

Q. How much pressure comes with being a number one seed?

KAYANA TRAYLOR: I mean, it's a little bit of pressure obviously, but I think we work to get to this point, and I mean, this is exactly what we wanted. It's more about taking advantage of the opportunity than thinking about like the pressure that's ^ onto ^ on to us. I think we just need to keep doing what we have done all year.

GEORGIA AMOORE: She covered it pretty well.

Q. I am going to get you to brag about your teammate here a little bit. Kayana came into the starting line in December, a crucial time for you. And you guys have been on this great run. How important has she been to the team's success and what does she bring to the floor?

GEORGIA AMOORE: It doesn't get talked about much. It doesn't show up on the stat sheet. Her defense is absolutely incredible. The way she hounds and hustles and doesn't stop. I think that's really good factor. We had that Louisville game and a couple people scored a couple baskets, but that doesn't stop her from playing really good defense.

She pushes the tempo on offense. No one can guard that left hand drive. Everyone knows it is coming, but no one can guard it. It's a different spark and flair.

Q. Another one of your teammates, what's it like to have someone like Liz back there who -- does she allow you guys defensively to maybe take more chances knowing you got a huge tree back there to swat everything away?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yes. She saves my butt a few times, pick and ^ roll ^ role situations, yeah.

KAYANA TRAYLOR: I would not say she allows it, but she's definitely there in case we do mess up.

GEORGIA AMOORE: She will help us, but she will be there to very much remind us that we still need to do our job.

Q. Offensively, what's she like to have?

GEORGIA AMOORE: She just draws so much attention. And like as a shooter, I appreciate that because people do turn their heads and look at her often. But you know it also opens us lanes for like driving because people do turn their heads and start towards Liz because they're worried about what she's going to do.

Q. You watched the second half last night of this South Dakota game?

GEORGIA AMOORE: First half.

Q. What jumped out at you about them?

GEORGIA AMOORE: We watched the first half in person. And then I went back and watched the rest of the game, but I think they're persistent. And as I said before, they're fundamentally sound. They have very good schemes and plays. And you know, I think they're just overall really tough. They don't let anything get to them. I think USC tried to pressure them. They didn't look phased at all. They continued to play their style. That's something that stuck out to me.

Q. Do they remind you of anybody you guys have played last couple years?

KAYANA TRAYLOR: Maybe like a better version of like a High Point or something like as far as like their offensive sets and how they want to spread the floor and stuff like that, but they are just super aggressive offensively I think.

Like I said, defensively they try to pack in the lane. But they're a good team. They play very well together and play very hard.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time.

Q. South Dakota State seems to have no fear. They have played good teams this year. They have beaten good teams this year. How much is that something you need to really impress upon your kids?

KENNY BROOKS: I don't think I need to impress it upon them. They can see it for own their own selves. They know that South Dakota State is a really good basketball team. I don't think, you know, Aaron and his group are fighting for respectability. They have been here for a long time. People who know, know that they're a very good program. They're competitors, compete, play hard, disciplined, play fundamentally good basketball.

So our kids understand it. They know that they're not just going to be able to, you know, walk through anything regardless of what the number is beside you. And the teams that are left are always going to be good. So they're not overlooking them. They know if we are going to win the basketball game, we are going to have to play extremely well, play hard and play disciplined basketball.

Q. How weird is it for you guys to face a player who scored almost as many points on the first round as your opponent?

KENNY BROOKS: It's not weird at all. Everything at this point in time is all about match ups. And you know, they're a talented group. They're not just a one person group. They could have a lot of kids that can play and can score. They're dangerous in that manner like we are.

They don't have to rely on one area, but they're well coached. They understand what they want to do. They're hard nosed. They're going to get after it, and we understand it.

Q. Kind of to go off your answer, we have heard multiple coaches allude to the fact that with SDSU, you have two options. Double team Myah and kick out three and shoot or guard the perimeter and give them

a path to the paint. How much is their balance and versatility a concern for you defensively and how do you combat that?

KENNY BROOKS: I can't tell you how I am going to combat that because somebody else might figure it out. We know. It's going to be a battle. We understand that. We know they're challenged in a lot of different ways. And I don't think we want to try to do anything that's going to allow them to be comfortable. We have to keep them off balance a little bit.

And you know, you watched the game last night. It was a defensive game from both sides of it. We understand that, but I just think that, you know, they're a physical basketball team, physical in a way that sometimes you don't see it. They're very handsy, very strong with their hands. They get their hands on a lot of basketballs. We are going to have to come out and be ready for the physicality and understand that everyone on that floor is dangerous.

Q. You know you went into the NCAA tournament last year. You were vocal and concerned about Florida Gulf Coast despite the number attached to their name. Do you have similar danger vibes from South Dakota State after who they have beaten and seeing them last night?

KENNY BROOKS: I know how good they are. I watched that game against South Carolina. I don't know if it was in December or January. They're not afraid of the moment. They're not afraid of whoever they're playing. I watched them play against Louisville in the Bahamas. I watched them play against UCLA in the Bahamas. They're good. And they know they're good. Anybody who is playing at this point in the season is a good team and they know they're good.

So we really feel like we need to come out and need to handle our situation and do what we do best and then I think we give ourselves a chance to win. We understand who they are. We understand the confidence level they have, very veteran group who plays extremely well together and they play hard.

Q. Jackrabbits when they play in the Summit League tournament have about 10,000 people in blue cheering for them. You have been where you have had crowds on your side and people, you know, trying to make matters hard for your team. How much of a difference does that make because your kids, in particular your student section, they do really get into it?

KENNY BROOKS: They do. They're knowledgeable. You know, they don't just show up for free bacon or whoever it

is they get. They're very loud. They know when to cheer. Case in point, we had a Georgia Amooore we played against Nebraska this year. And the game was pretty much in hand. And they were really rowdy. They were into it, and I'm like I didn't even know, I'm like what are they cheering for? And one of my staff members told me Georgia was a certain amount of rebounds away from a triple double. They were knowledgeable to understand that. And when she actually got it, they just erupted.

And it just goes to show you they're not here just for the free promo, free for any other thing. They're really into it. And they're very knowledgeable. They are loud, and I do think it could be advantage for us.

I don't think it -- in a close game, it could be a difference. You know, we have played in front of crowds like that. We have played at Indiana for the W19 Championship. It was a sell out and close game. I think that crowd put them over the hump.

We are hoping that tomorrow can be a very similar situation. We figure it's probably going to be a tight game if we can get on a run and the crowd can really get into it. It can propel us into six nothing run, eight nothing run. That could be a difference in the game.

Q. Isn't it great for women's basketball to have that kind of environment?

KENNY BROOKS: Phenomenal. I played at James Madison, and I played for a guy named Lefty Driesell. He brought an excitement to our community where every game was sold out. Every game was sold out. We got to experience that firsthand. I coached on the men's side for ten years. I watched -- we played in front of, you know, sell out crowds, big crowds all the time.

I have three daughters. I switched over to the women's side. And ever since then, I have been championing for the cause for the girls to just go be able to play in front of crowds like this because year and year out, I watched how hard they work. I watch how hard they work. How much they put into it, the sweat, the blood, the tears, the pride. And sometimes you walk out there and it's empty arenas. And it's heartbreaking because they deserve everything that their male counterparts get.

The game is as beautiful. If you just come out and watch, you really get into it. You will enjoy it. It's different. It's very different, but it's very enjoyable. And these kids work so hard. And for them to be able to experience something like this, I was so happy. I have been happy. I have been talking about it. I have been talking about Cassell Coliseum can make a good team great. They have done

that really well this year, but any time you can go out, and you know, you don't want to play in front of 10,000 that are not for you, but just to be able to have that experience, you know, it just warms my heart. And I'm very happy, very proud of what Hokie Nation has done for us. I'm very happy our kids have been able to experience it.

Q. Big picture question, last time you were at the stage, two years ago, Covid tournament, I know it was weird in San Antonio. Kim Mulkey gives you some words of advice. If you can speak to the growth of the program since that moment, is that how you envisioned the trajectory since that moment?

KENNY BROOKS: Kim came up to me, and we had masks on, and she says I know you are smiling behind that mask because your team is going to be damn good. And she says they are just babies right now. She was right. Georgia was freshman. Liz was a sophomore. Kayla was a sophomore. I think Aisha Sheppard at the time was a junior.

She said you keep working. You guys are going to be there. And she patted me on my backside and walked away. At that moment it was her. And it rang really clear. You know, we were not ready for that moment, but we needed that experience to get ready for that moment. And it prepared us. It prepared us for the next year even though we bowed out early. We understand what we needed to do to get to this point and beyond.

So we have grown. We have grown. The kids are more experienced. But as opposed to hoping to win, they expect to win. And that gives you that confidence and it gives you the opportunity to move forward.

Q. You have talked about how smart this group is. You have also talked about how Georgia is kind of like your mini me around the court. How has she played a ^ roll ^ role in your group's ability as the scene has gone ^ onto ^ on to become even better than you guys already were at adjusting in game? And I saw there was a scenario yesterday she ran over to you and was -- I think she explained to you she was like get Cayla the ball because they're helping a certain way.

How has she specifically been able to kind of help you guys adjust even better in game than you would have been able to before?

KENNY BROOKS: I always described her relationship as she's my mini me. Somebody explained it a little better than I did the other day. They said -- it was a coach. And they said, you know, what you have is you have a 53-year-old mind on a 20-year old kid's body. It was so

true. She thinks like I do. She knows what I want, and she knows what's good for the team.

The scenario you are talking about when she came over and she was very adamant about what it was, and when she's like that, I'm like, okay, just go with it. That's the trust I have in her because she sees it, and she knows exactly what's going on out there. And she knows what I want. It's a luxury. It's a luxury because, you know, she's developed into our leader.

We always felt she was going to be. Now she's at the point. She just knows what's great, what's best for the program. And she's very humble. As well as she playing, you know, she wants to deflect and give her teammates a lot of credit too. You have that kind of a recipe, you are going to be successful, but she's unbelievable.

I thought she played exceptionally well yesterday. We are going to need her to play that way again tomorrow if we are going to win.

Q. You talked about how you played for Lefty Driesell. I'm kind of curious, what kind of impact did he have on you and you becoming a coach?

KENNY BROOKS: Everything. He actually sent me a note yesterday. I got it in the mail. Great job, coach. Everything. You know, obviously when I played for him, I will be very honest, I thought he was the craziest man in the world. But I think I got to see a different side of him because he actually was the one who hired me and gave me my first coaching job.

And my interview went like he called me up and it was a Friday afternoon, he said, Kenny, I said, yes, sir, he said you still want to coach? I said absolutely. He said be here Monday. That was my interview. And I got to work with him, but I got to see him from a different side. You know, things he was doing to us, we thought he was doing them to us because he was actually doing them for us, very generous man. He made me a better player, but he made me a better person.

The way he loved his family, the way he incorporated his family into everything that we did from a basketball standpoint is my recipe. It's what I do. You have to bring your family into it. But a very generous man, and I learned a lot. I found myself still doing the same things that he did to us to my kids with the generosity, but just trying to make them a better people. He made me a better man. He really did. Made me a better man. I owe him a lot.

My biggest claim to fame with him, he was given his induction speech, and he got to a point he said I got two

former players that are head coaches, and he paused and he went somewhere else. And I think I might have said, he is talking about me, and he didn't say my name. I talked to him about a week after that and he said, Kenny, I was going to talk about you in my acceptance speech, but I forgot your name and just kept on going. And I said, coach, as long as you were thinking about me in that moment, and you know, that's big enough for me.

But I love the man. I got to do something special last year for his 90th birthday. We did a Zoom birthday party type thing for him. They wanted me to be the ^ reputation ^ representation from James Madison. They said you are going to go on after Coach K right before Scott, and I'm like well damn, this is a pretty big deal. I got to do that, and he told me he loved me. I told him I loved him. He's still keeping up with us.

Q. I remember your name. So at JMU, you did things that had not been done there before. You coached an NCAA scoring champion. Now you are at Virginia Tech, a number one seed. What's that pressure like to like, you know, to make the best of it?

KENNY BROOKS: To what make?

Oh, you know, the older I get, I have learned to stop and smell the roses. When I was younger at James Madison, there's the old saying you sometimes you get so busy making a life, you don't live a life. All of those teams I had, they would say remember that team you had in 2012, and I have no recollection of who was on my team in 2012 because after the 2012 season, I was ready for the 2013/2014 season.

This particular group, I have made myself stop to smell the roses and enjoy every moment I'm having with them because it's special to be able to coach Elizabeth Kitley and watch her develop and what she's done for this program and this university. It's special to coach a Georgia Amore, a Kayana Traylor. I want to enjoy every moment with it. And that's been very enjoyable for me this year. I just really have stopped and enjoyed all of the little moments with this group.

I will always remember it. I know if someone says what about your group in 2023, I know exactly who they're talking about because you can't let life just pass you by, and this group is extremely special, and what they do and what they accomplish and how they represent and every time they get up here and talk, you know, to a press conference, you know, I'm proud.

I'm proud because, you know, we built this from the ground up, and I'm excited to be a part of it.

Q. In terms of South Dakota State, when you see them on film or in person, what do you see to explain why they're good enough to beat a Louisville or Mississippi State or USC?

KENNY BROOKS: They're very well coached. They understand their assignment. They're very physical. They're talented. They're a unit. You know, someone asked earlier about, you know, just the one person, they're not one person. They're a unit. And that play extremely well together. A lot of actions they do, they do them so they can have a counteraction. And we understand that, physical basketball team on both ends of the floor. And they're going to give you everything they have.

And like I mentioned before, they're not scared of the moment. They're not scared of, you know, when some people call a Power Five. They think they're as good as anyone. And I agree, I think they are. And do I think they're a nine seed, no, I don't think so. You watch some of the teams around the country who have better seeding, and I know they went through their conference pretty easily. And maybe that's why they got a nine seed, but they're a good basketball team. And they belong where they are. They belong to have an opportunity to advance because they're extremely well coached.

They're physical, and they're experienced. So we are not taking them lightly. We know how good they are. We know why they're here. We think it's going to be a hard fought battle tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time.

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