

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

Sunday, March 19, 2023

Blacksburg, Virginia, USA

Cassell Coliseum

Virginia Tech Hokies
Coach Kenny Brooks

Georgia Amoore

Elizabeth Kitley

Media Conference

Virginia Tech 72, South Dakota State 60

KENNY BROOKS: So proud of these kids. So proud of this program. I was just doing radio, and full-circle moment when the very first game that I ever coached as a head coach on the women's side, it was in this building, and I was at James Madison, and we played against Bonnie Henrickson's team, and we lost in overtime.

I remember after the game, Coach Beamer, who I didn't know at the time, obviously he's a legend, he told me, he said, "good game, young fella," and that meant the world to me just because he spoke to me. In a full-circle moment, Coach Beamer is out there telling me what a great program we have right now and how much he enjoys watching and how proud of these kids he is.

To be able to get this group, this program to this level is very, very special, and I couldn't do it without these young ladies.

Great game. I thought we played really well. South Dakota State, tremendous ballclub, very well-coached, disciplined. They're tough. We knew we were going to have our hands full, but the kids came out, got off to a great start. Didn't finish the way we wanted to, but it's very gratifying to be able to get to this point.

Q. What does it mean to have helped this program get to the Sweet 16 for the first time since 1999?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yeah, it means the absolute world.



Obviously when we started this year, Sweet 16 was the goal, amongst ACC championship, and I just think it's great that we've accomplished all of that, but the tournament and the job really isn't done, so I'm excited to get to Seattle and still play some games and keep moving.

ELIZABETH KITLEY: Oh, yeah, same. That's just what we had been saying was one of our big goals this year. So for us to have done it for the program and just for my teammates and coaches, it just means everything. But yeah, we definitely feel like we can go farther, so we're looking forward to it.

Q. You guys doubled their three-point shot attempts. Georgia, you alone had 19 three-point attempts. Was that a clear strategy from the outset, or were you just feeling it in the moment?

GEORGIA AMOORE: No. To be honest, it was a different defense than I've played against this year. They didn't really go over screens or have a hand up, so I was just taking them. To be honest, I like taking a three more than a lay-up, so...

Q. To follow up on that, second most threes attempted in program history behind Aisha Sheppard with 20 a couple years ago. Georgia, a few were off the mark in the third quarter, but you nailed two clutch ones to really put the game away. What about your confidence even after missing a few led to --

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yeah, I was getting frustrated, but then I looked over to Coach Books, and he just said, I need you to give me those eyes, I need you to be locked in. I knew I had taken a lot. I didn't know it was that many, but that just went out my mind because we needed baskets.

Q. When you look back at the offense that you guys were clicking in the first half there, what enabled you to be so effective in the first half? Obviously the threes were going in the first quarter, and Liz, you got going in the second quarter.

ELIZABETH KITLEY: I think we were just shooting really well. I think we were moving the ball really well. We



weren't settling, we were just taking really good shots. I think we were also taking advantage of offensive rebounds. That's what it felt like at least.

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yeah, I think we just played with an offensive aggression in the beginning and getting downhill and kick-outs, yeah.

Q. Did they defend you any differently in the second half? What made it tough to score at times, and what did you like about the way that you guys kind of continued to find a way to get stuff done on the defensive end, to not let them kind of dig into that margin you guys had?

GEORGIA AMOORE: I don't think they changed anything strategically. I think they just played for aggressive than they were the first half, and I think at the beginning of the second half we took a step back in aggression, and that's what allowed them to do that.

Q. Liz, you get yet another double-double. Is that something you're conscious of when you're on the court, or is it just -- you just keep playing and you just hope that you play well?

ELIZABETH KITLEY: I'm definitely conscious of if I need to rebound or not. Luckily I always have coaches to tell me that I need to rebound, keep me in check.

Q. They shot only 37 percent from the field tonight. What did you like about how you defended them?

ELIZABETH KITLEY: I think that we did a good job of knowing that they were going to be physical coming into the game, so we talked about how we had to be physical, also and kind of set the tone from the start and not just let them do whatever they want. So I think we were just ready, and I think we had a lot more intensity than we did on Friday. We came out just, yeah, really intense, I guess.

Q. You guys obviously had to kind of grind out that victory. You were able to keep it at double digits. How important do you think it is for you to have to grind out a win like this, especially with the challenges that lay ahead?

GEORGIA AMOORE: I think we could definitely make it easier on ourselves but not succumbing to other people's aggression. I think Chattanooga even went on a run like that in the beginning of the second half, and we just can't allow that to happen. But we learned from it, and I'm glad that we did the Chattanooga game, and this game we'll have to take away from it, too.

Q. Liz, you came into this game tied for the record and most blocked shots for a career and then you broke it in the second quarter with a couple back-to-back in like a six-second span. You're now the all-time leader in blocked shots in this program's history. How does that sound?

ELIZABETH KITLEY: That's cool, yeah. I had no idea until somebody mentioned it the other day, so yeah, it's nice, I guess.

Q. Georgia, about 15, 12 seconds crowd to go in the game, you raised your hands to get the crowd to go even louder as you guys were dribbling out the clock. What was going through your minds there in the last 15, 12 seconds?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Just a big thank you to everyone in the program. Like that crowd was ridiculous. I've said it once, and I'll say it again: The stadium was shaking. It was really intimidating, and it was just electrifying. It's big for us getting to the Sweet 16 but it's big for everyone and all of them, because sold out, the student site crashing in five minutes. All of that is just the support that we love, and we really do appreciate it.

Q. For both of you guys, they seemed really, really physical defensively, and it just seemed like you guys kept getting beat up a little bit inside, especially you, Liz. You continued to fight through it. What's going through your head when maybe some calls aren't going your way but it's a physical game and you've got to keep battling?

ELIZABETH KITLEY: Yeah, like you said, it is what it is. We just knew that we had to bring that back and not expect any calls and just play through it, but also playing smarter, too, and strategizing how to still get what we wanted out of that physicality.

Q. Kenny, I want to expand a little bit more on what you said at the beginning. As somebody who has grown up in the state of Virginia, knowing all you've been through with this program, with all the players, how gratifying is it to get to this step? Obviously there's more ahead, but to do it in Cassell Coliseum and to do it with Aisha Sheppard and Frank Beamer and so many important people in attendance, what does all this mean to you?

KENNY BROOKS: It means a lot to be a part of it because Hokie Nation is very special. There's been wonderful people that have come through here in all different sports, and to be able to contribute to it means a lot because the fan base is second to none. They're very loyal, and they

love to get behind you, and they love winners.

So when we can go out -- obviously success. Mike won the ACC last year, softball team is phenomenal, our baseball team is great. We have so many wonderful programs, swim and dive, soccer is so good. When we can come out and do our part, it's very gratifying because this fan base is loyal, and to be able to give back to them after how they stuck with us and been very patient with us, it's special. It really is.

I'm just very happy our kids are able to experience this. We've mentioned it before, the crowd was unbelievable. They really got us over the hump, so it was a really special moment.

Q. For you guys to make the Sweet 16 for the first time since '99, what is it about this year's team that you were able to finally accomplish that milestone?

KENNY BROOKS: We're good. And that's not being over -- we're good. Elizabeth is an All-American, Georgia is an All-American, Taylor Soule got us over the hump with her play, her unselfishness, Kayana Traylor, what she sacrificed to be a part of this program. Cayla King has been a staple in what we've been doing, D'asia Gregg. We're a good basketball team, and we're starting to put it together, a lot of unselfishness.

I love the way that they're connected. We lost to Duke on I think it was January the 26th, and we didn't panic. We knew how good we could be. From that point on, they've had a different look in their eye to continue to be able to get to this point right now.

Q. Towards the end of the third quarter, start of the fourth quarter, there were a lot of foul calls in quick succession, and it sort of helped turn the momentum in favor of the Jackrabbits. What did you guys need to do to sort of turn the momentum back in your favor?

KENNY BROOKS: Well, we needed to be more alert. We referenced it by saying play early defense. I thought we were back on our heels and they were coming at us, and we were reacting, and it was a little bit too late, and we gave up some and-ones. We almost were playing not to lose instead of playing to win.

You give them credit; we knew they were going to continue to come after us, and they did a really good job in doing that, but that was the difference.

I just felt a couple times uncharacteristically we got beat in transition, they got easy lay-ups.

To be honest with you, I'll be extremely honest with you, we were tired. We were fatigued. I was contemplating when to use some time-outs so that they could rest. We didn't play very many people, played seven people tonight, and they got a little bit tired. I think that was the reason.

Q. How important was Kayana Traylor tonight, especially in that first half, best plus-minus among your players tonight. How important was she in getting the shot down?

KENNY BROOKS: She was huge. We had a situation early this week, and we didn't get a lot of practice time together. She had a scare. I think she hyperextended her knee. We were scared, and fortunate for us she was okay and able to come back.

During that time, I just had a little bit of time to reflect, and I didn't want that to be it for her. She's a phenomenal kid, and what she has sacrificed -- people don't understand, that kid -- when Georgia gets a lot of the attention and Liz gets a lot of the attention, Kayana is as good as any of them, and what she's willing to sacrifice to just come here and win, she'll forever be one of my favorite kids I've ever coached. She was really big.

Right before the game, I said, look, I want to look out there and I want you to have a smile on your face the whole game because you're playing loose and free, and she came out and she gave us a big spark in the first half, helped us a lot in the second half, did a great job defensively, and very proud of her, very happy for her.

Q. End of the second quarter seemed like every shot was falling, and really just the first half overall, but third quarter starting off 1 for 7. What changed defensively about them and how did you guys have to adjust?

KENNY BROOKS: I don't know what he will say, what they did. I thought that we didn't have that little pop. We came out a little bit flat in the second half. First half we were moving the basketball side to side, getting opportunities, stepping up, shooting them with confidence, and then the second half I thought we started off a little bit flat.

When you're up 23 and -- I just I don't know why we were flat, but I think that was a lot to do with it. But give them credit; they were a little bit more physical. They had very little to lose at that point, and we knew they were going to come out and be aggressive, and they were, and they beat us to some of the 50/50 balls.

Q. There were a bunch of different moments there in the third quarter where you needed a bucket and you

needed somebody to attack the rim and Taylor Soule was that player. She's done it so much for you this season and she was really, really good on the defensive end. For this to be her first ever NCAA Tournament, how special do you think this is for her, and what did you like so much about what she did tonight?

KENNY BROOKS: That's why she came here. It's storybook for her because she sacrificed a lot. She was Boston College's leading scorer, and when we recruited her, she said, I just want to be part of a winning program and I want to win an ACC championship and I want to go far in the tournament. It's well-documented she and I had a really long, stern conversation in January, and from that point, she's been locked in.

She's a terrific addition to us. Doesn't really need the basketball in her hand to be effective. They were playing off of her, and they were double-teaming Liz, and she got free, got free and made them pay for it.

But she does so many things for us, not just offensively, like you mentioned before, she did a great job making Myah work for everything, and that's what we really wanted her to do.

Q. What did you like about your defense and how you guarded today?

KENNY BROOKS: We understood the assignment. We wanted to make it tough for them. They're very disciplined, and they're very efficient, so we knew that they knew where they wanted to get the basketball, so we wanted to try to make it tough for them, make it tough, put them in situations where they were going to have to make tough shots, and we knew they were going to make some of them, we did really good job, but we also really defended the three-point line exceptionally well. They shoot the three as well as we do. Their numbers are almost identical, and we wanted to make sure that every time they were shooting it, we were somewhere around them to mess with them a little bit, and we did that. I think they were 2 for 15 from the three, and I think that was a big difference.

Q. What was kind of going through your mind in those closing seconds of the game?

KENNY BROOKS: It was a sigh of relief. I'm like, finally it's over. It was a great moment because as it was winding down with 15 seconds to go or so, for the first time I was able to look into the crowd. I didn't really look into the crowd. I knew Dr. Sands was behind me. I knew my family was right behind me, but other than that, I didn't

really look into the crowd. 15 seconds to go, a lot of emotions came through, to be able to get to this point. I knew it was going to be a program record, 29 wins.

But more importantly, it was just to get these kids to this opportunity to go to the Sweet 16. We watched other teams do it before, and these kids are competitors. Liz doesn't care about her stats. She just wants to win.

I texted her the other night, last night as a matter of fact, and I apologized for not getting her more involved at the Chattanooga game, but I didn't want to run some of the plays we were going to run tonight. She says, Coach, I don't care, I just want to win. It doesn't matter if I score at all, I just want to win. When your leading scorer All-American says that, you know you've got a pretty good, special group.

I'm just happy to get them to this point, and they're going to be able to enjoy the Sweet 16.

Q. Was that the plan to come out shooting on fire like that, and Georgia coming down the stretch especially it seemed like she had --

KENNY BROOKS: Well, I mean, all of them had the green light. They know each other so well that they all have the green light, and none of them are hesitant. We don't tell them not to shoot the basketball. I thought Friday's game was really good to get under our belt because I thought we were a little bit nervous. They'd never played in front of a crowd that big. We hadn't played in a while, then to try to get that game, try to get some rhythm was really good. The kids came in this weekend and got some extra shots during the practice period, and they looked good. Today they looked really good. I went home after shootaround and my wife said, how did they look. I said, they looked pretty damn good, but they just looked confident and ready to go. They came out, and they just played.

The beauty about this group is they don't have to have Liz to score all the time. We'll get the ball to Liz, but Cayla King knows if she's open, let it fly, Kayana Traylor, she knows if she's open, let it go, and because they know if they move the basketball that eventually it comes back to them. They're so unselfish, and that's exactly the way I know we're capable of playing, the way they started off playing tonight.

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