

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

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Blacksburg, Virginia, USA

Cassell Coliseum

Virginia Tech Hokies

Kenny Brooks

Georgia Amooore

Cayla King

Media Conference



CAYLA KING: I think they're different than a lot of ACC teams. I think we see that in non-conference a lot. A lot of different schemes and styles that we're not used to in ACC play. But we have seen some presses, like Duke has a really good press. There's some really defensive-minded teams in the ACC, so I think we are prepared for that. But, yeah, just keeping our composure all game and once we break the press, we're good.

Q. Georgia, what does playing in Cassell, playing at home, that kind of bring nice comfort? I know, obviously, big stage, NCAA tournament, but to be back home to be in Cassell, a place where you guys are undefeated this year, what is that like?

GEORGIA AMOORE: It's always an absolute pleasure to play in Cassell, obviously. But after last year when we hosted and they sung and all that, it's just the energy that they bring. It's great for us and we appreciate it, but the energy on campus completely shifts. It changes. I went to class yesterday, I had like eight people come up to me saying, I couldn't get a ticket, or, I got a ticket. Like, everyone's so excited, and for us that's kind of more rewarding the impact that we've had on this campus and people around here. So, yeah, playing in Cassell, it's great, the energy's great, and I cannot wait to see what everyone brings.

CAYLA KING: I think it's the best place to play, so, yeah, I mean, it's just number one.

Q. Cayla, what is, this last week, coach mentioned that normally after the ACC tournament you guys would have spring break, but the schedule was different this year so you guys were kind of still in that mode. What has been the mindset of the team since the ACC tournament to prepare and just kind of keep your bodies in shape when you didn't know necessarily who you were playing?

CAYLA KING: I think it's pretty similar. We still had a couple days rest. We just had classes this time. We didn't have a break from school.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. What's become the team mindset going into tomorrow? Is like all the pressure off because there's no expectations if the team does not have Liz, or is there even more pressure because everyone feels like if there's no Liz, maybe you got to make up for that output?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Mindset has stayed very much the same all the year, regardless of who we're playing, where we're playing at, what kind of stakes are at with us. So our mindset, it's been pretty solid and been pretty consistent the whole year so we haven't really been focused on that.

Q. Did the two games in Greensboro for the ACC tournament without Liz, was that, did that kind of get you guys used to playing without her if that is going to be the case this week?

CAYLA KING: I think we've had a couple games in the past couple years without Liz. Of course, she's a big part of our team, but she's not solely the team. We have a lot of talent on the team. We had only one practice to prepare for those two games, but like Georgia said, we're pretty confident in ourselves and we're ready for either way, we're just focused on the game ahead of us and we take it one game at a time.

Q. Marshall has a different look. Are they particularly tough to prepare for, and have you seen any -- I'm sure you've been pressed at some point, but any kind of press that resembles what they do?



GEORGIA AMOORE: She's in a Masters program, so she can just stay home and chill.

CAYLA KING: I still do work. We had a couple days rest, but I think it was resetting, regrouping. Like you said, big, important part of the year, so we have to make sure our bodies are good, staying healthy. Then just kind of re-scheming and trying to get together, and like we said, we only had one practice before and now we have like a whole two weeks. We didn't know who we were playing, but I think we focus on ourselves the most, so it didn't really matter who our opponent was. I think it was just a good little week to reset.

Q. To follow-up, Cayla, you said that before the tournament you only had one practice to kind of prepare without Liz. So the fact that you've had more than that for tomorrow, how has that made things different? Has that led you to be more comfortable if you don't have Liz tomorrow or is it about a whole different, you're going to play a whole different way without Liz, now that you've had the extra time to prepare, what's that extra time kind of made a difference in?

CAYLA KING: We're prepared for any situation no matter what, with or without her. Just to prepare us either way so we'll be ready.

Q. Georgia, we know about your relationship with Liz when you look at the pick and role, pick and pop, you guys work together in individuals, all that stuff. So have you been able to work some with Clara, timing-wise, pick and pop, that kind of stuff, tell me more about that?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yeah, obviously the relationship between Liz and I is very much highlighted because we do it all game, every game. Like, when you play 38 minutes together it's going to be on full display. What people don't see is in practice Clara is filling in that role the whole year. He's incorporated her. It's a tough situation being a freshman and then become a backup to an All-American and three time Player of the Year, but she gets those reps. Her and have I done that -- I have obviously done it more with Liz throughout the years, but she steps in, she takes the reps. Even sometimes Cayla and I will alternate the guard position. She's had reps with Liz doing pick-and-roll. So it's like very much well incorporated. Coach Brooks knows what he's doing and he's prepared for whatever, so I've had plenty of reps with Clara. Obviously, she's just a little baby (laughing).

Q. Obviously hosting last year, couple big games earlier in the season down in Charlotte, but still the

moment can get big for some of these freshmen, Carys Baker, Carleigh Wenzel, Samyha Suffren, Clara Strack, as you mentioned, how do you coach them through, that being two veterans on the team and not let the moment get too big?

GEORGIA AMOORE: I think at the end of the day it's just keeping the main thing the main thing, and that for us is just basketball. Obviously, there's a lot of attention, a lot of pressure and expectations, but I think as long as we keep our focus on our focus, like it's easier to deal with it that way. Obviously I think out our leadership group, me, Cayla and Liz are very confident, not only in ourselves, but in the girls. So we've been pretty, I would say persistent with gassing them up, for lack of a better term, but, yeah, we have the utmost confidence in all of them. We really want the best for everyone. So it's no negative vibes over here, it's, we're excited, if anything.

CAYLA KING: Pretty much what Georgia said. I think now it's nice to have, they have the Charlotte game under their belt, we went to LSU, we just played in the ACC tournament, so they have now a couple big games under their belt. We just try and keep them in check that, when you're in the game really everything is tuned out. It's kind of hard to know, if you're not a player, like you have so many people after games, Like, did you hear me yelling at you? Like, no, I didn't hear you in, like, the eighth row. But when you're playing it's kind of just all like you and your team and your coach. It's all you hear. I think they have been really good at that this year and they will continue to be like that.

Q. Georgia, curious, what has Liv meant to you guys? She does so many little things, doesn't necessarily score a lot, but grabs so many rebounds. What kind of consistency and leadership as a veteran has she brought you to you guys?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Oh, yeah. Her whole philosophy and the way she's been has been like persistent and consistent. Like, at the start of the year she was very much struggling to find her role, obviously coming from Wake where maybe she had different players surrounding her and she was expected to do different things. She stuck with it all throughout the year. To tell the truth, she probably struggled off the court early in the year, because she was just trying to grasp her role and really understand it. But she's fulfilled it. She's come and figured out what she needed to do for us to be successful. And as you said the pressure she puts on the boards is massive for us. Honestly, like her and Liz rebounding together, it's great. She had a couple of really big double digit rebounding games where she might have had only eight points, six points. But she knows her role, she's comfortable with it,

and she's so valuable to us. Even off the court, her leadership style, it's very collected, very calm. I think a lot of the girls trust her and go to her for a lot of different things. She's just a brilliant person.

Q. When you figured out the game was a sellout, obviously you've had really good crowds here all year, but what does that say for the growth of just women's basketball as a whole and the excitement around a tournament atmosphere like this?

CAYLA KING: I think it's pretty crazy. I remember seeing the tickets were on sale and then I opened Instagram maybe 15 minutes later and it's like, nine minutes ago Hoke women's basketball posted it's a sellout. I didn't get to tell my family tickets are on sale yet and it's sold out. I got my six tickets for them, so we're good. But it's crazy over the five years to see how much women's basketball and specifically Hoke women's basketball, the support we have, and we wouldn't have had a sellout even if we were hosting four years ago. So now to have, I don't even know how many games we've sold out this year, six, seven, but it's just crazy. We have fun playing, so it's fun to have people enjoy watching us play.

GEORGIA AMOORE: Goes back to the point I made before about how everyone around here is just excited. It's very much a reciprocated relationship. They come and they're excited for us and we're excited that they're there and they're cheering. I think even this time last year -- maybe not this time -- earlier last year, we were still begging people to come to our games. We were going around, I was handing out donuts, we were driving the golf cart around campus yelling at people to get tickets. The transformation has been incredible. We love it and we hope that everyone here knows how much we adore them coming and showing out.

Q. The last, obviously, when you played your last game against Notre Dame without Liz, did not go well. Where does the improvement have to come from if you're playing without Liz tomorrow?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Confidence. I think we probably could have grabbed it a bit more head on. First half we were there, we did not hit shots, we did not play our best. Then the start of the third quarter was, they just blitzed us, and we let it get away from us. We never really had that fight back. It's nothing spectacular, like we can hit shots and we can play more aggressive and I think that was just the deciphering factor in that game.

Q. As a point guard when you're going up against a team that's one of the top teams in the country in steals, do you kind of, does that get the competitive

juices going? What's your mindset?

GEORGIA AMOORE: My mindset is the same going into every game. Obviously, a large responsibility is on me to control the team and the tempo and keep my composure, and I think if I'm crazy and wilding out, then the four of the other girls on the court are going to follow my lead. It's a big responsibility, but I've been in many many different positions before. You want to talk about the Ohio State press and all of that, we could have said the same thing going into that game. But I kept my focus straight and I think I did a pretty good job of handling that. But Marshal's a completely different team. The way they press is completely different. They apply of a lot of pressure, so keeping my composure and making the right reads is going to be at the forefront of my mind.

Q. Do you guys think that Carleigh Wenzel is someone who could step up for you guys in this tournament?

CAYLA KING: Carleigh, yeah, that's my roomie right there. No, she's been ready, she's been working. Of course, she's a redshirt freshman, so I think just another year under her belt and practice and watching Georgia and watching me and even people from last year, KT. She's prepared, she's shown really good glimpses of what she can be. She's an aggressive downhill driver that I think will come in handy for us in the next couple games, and just her staying focused is going to be key for us and she's going to give us good minutes.

GEORGIA AMOORE: That woman is a sponge. She's asking all these annoying questions, borderline to the point where I get annoyed with her in practice, I'm like, get away from me. But she asks a lot of questions, she's so intrigued, she always want to know how she can get better. I'll get a text from her late night and she'll be like, can we watch some film, can we get together, can we work out. And I'll be like, chill, I'm tired -- no, I'm kidding. I try and give her the blueprint, I try and help her, but she loves basketball, she's excited about the opportunity she gets, so, yeah, she will be good for us.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time. We'll have coach out here in just a moment.

(Pause.)

THE MODERATOR: Welcome back.

KENNY BROOKS: It's great to be back. Exciting time of the year. Been a long year, but we're excited to be here.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for coach, please.

KENNY BROOKS: Before I -- I'll go ahead and start. Elizabeth Kitley will not participate in the NCAA tournament this year due to a lower leg injury that she suffered on March the 3rd. We're just praying for her and her mental health right now, and she's still a part of what we do and she's big in what we've done. So, heartfelt, you know, just goes out to her, because everything that she's done for this program and everything that she will continue to do through her legacy. So, right now our prayers are just up for her.

THE MODERATOR: Certainly our best, too. We'll open it up to questions.

Q. You've had a couple weeks now without Liz, and have to imagine you've known for a couple weeks you wouldn't have her. How does that affect your preparation for this and how has that allowed you to maybe ramp up for this moment?

KENNY BROOKS: It really hasn't been as easy as you might think. Obviously emotionally it's probably been one of the most trying couple weeks of my life, for the kids as well, just because of what she means to us. So, we had to try to revamp it and re-invent ourselves heading into the ACC tournament. Seemed like we had a week to prepare, but we only had one day because we had a day off in there and then the day before the game you don't get much time on the floor, so we really only had one day of prep. So, we get back from the ACC tournament and you give 'em a couple days off so they can rest their bodies and you start to try to prepare again for essentially a goes. You don't know who your opponent is going to be to you try and work on yourself, work on yourself. And then you get your matchup and then your matchup is one of the more unorthodox matchups that you can get because of the way that they play. Marshall presses you on makes and misses, something that we haven't seen before. So throughout this week we've been trying to re-invent ourselves again. It hasn't been as smooth as the calendar might show, because it looks like we had time to do it, but we've had to just kind of re-invent ourselves twice during this period to try to get ready for the matchup tomorrow.

Q. You guys have seen a bunch of different styles in the ACC this year. Does any team, any, I'm sure --

KENNY BROOKS: No.

Q. Maybe a combination?

KENNY BROOKS: No. No. What Marshall does, they're very persistent and they're very committed to the press. They're committed to the pressure on a make, but the unorthodox part is they're really committed to it on a miss.

They're going to run around, they're small in stature in height, but they're very persistent and they really come after you. They're very physical. They're very physical. They allow themselves to be physical because they play 10, 12, 13 people. So if they get in foul trouble with one certain area, it doesn't matter. They hockey sub. They're five in, five out. We're watching the game, and one minute and 30 seconds into the game they had five new kids coming in. So that's something that we've had to prep for too. We're going to need the kids to really be able to communicate on the floor, not only through the pressure, through the press and whatnot, but also matchups. Because we're not going to be able to use our White board and say, Hey, you have number such and such, you have number such and such. They're going to have to really do it themselves. So that's something that we've had to prep for all week.

Q. In terms of taking care of the basketball, how much of an all hands on deck is it going to be for you guys?

KENNY BROOKS: Absolutely. I think the misconception is that we're going to have to have Georgia to do it by herself. That's not the case at all. It's going to be all hands on deck. It's not fair to put that much pressure on her to try to do it. Now I think that she will have some success in doing it, obviously she was third team AP All-American, so that proves that she's one of the best point guards in the country and she's going to have her success doing it, but we can't rely on her because we need her to do other things as well. So all week we've been practicing, we've had our practices and we've actually put some additional players on the floor against us to just make sure we can handle the chaos and keep our poise doing so.

Q. Curious, how has Liz been throughout this whole process, I have to imagine it's a pretty devastating way for a career to end here?

KENNY BROOKS: Hard. She's been emotional. I've been emotional. I think we probably text each other probably 30 times a day. She will be good and then she will be sad. The kid has put everything into this and she's the reason we are here. She's the reason we are here. If it weren't for her and the way that she plays we would probably be somewhere else at a different venue instead of being able to host, instead of being able to say that we're the ACC regular season champions. So the kid ate, slept, drank basketball, but everything Hoke basketball. So for her to suffer this injury when it happens, it's never a good time to happen, but heading into it, she was playing out of her mind. We were playing out of our minds. We were playing extremely well. Had everything going. For it to be taken away from you just in a split second is devastating. It's probably been the hardest two weeks that you've ever

had coaching, just trying to keep her mental state, and that's the most important thing, is to keep her mental state together, but also the team, because everyone is really close knit, and to see her go down, their heart is out for her. So it's been hard. It's been hard, but she's a tough kid. There's no question in my mind that she's going to attack this rehab like crazy. It's just devastating for it to happen to her at this moment.

Q. What's been the timetable, when did you guys know she was not going to play again and so forth?

KENNY BROOKS: Honestly, I respect your question, but I really don't think that it's that important, just because the whole thing was there's no issue other than we were just really trying to protect her mental health. My main focus the last two weeks is to make sure she's okay. It's been really tough for her, so to go out and make a statement or say whatever early when she wasn't ready to deal with it, that's all that mattered to me. So the timetable really doesn't matter. We really had to, when we did come to the conclusion, we locked in and we focused, but I promise you, and I'm not trying to be deceitful or anything like that, but the main focus was her. And I didn't, that was the only thing that mattered to me was make sure we protected her mental -- and that's very important, because she's a special kid who, like I said before, put everything into this. For it to be taken away from her, that's all I did was went into protective mode and made sure she was okay.

Q. What did the injury turn out to be?

KENNY BROOKS: She tore her ACL. So now she will get back to the point where she will rehab.

Q. I asked about timetable, but because, have you been operating for some time now, knowing you wouldn't have her and practicing and knowing you wouldn't have her?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, I think I stated it earlier, that it's been, we've had a little bit of time from a calendar standpoint to try to re-invent ourselves, but and then with the matchup that we got we had to try to re-invent ourselves again differently, because it's a very unorthodox -- we haven't seen anything like it. And the way that they pressure and their style, the physicality, the -- I mean, now you look across the country, everybody's playing seven or eight people. They go 12 strong. That's something that you have to account for. We really had to try to re-invent ourselves in the last few days.

Q. How important has your leadership group of Georgia and Cayla and somebody like Olivia, a veteran, been over these, this last week while you guys

are prepping going into a big tournament, there's still basketball left to be played, how important has the leadership from them been?

KENNY BROOKS: I think also you throw Liz in there and without -- obviously, Liz is devastated, but she didn't want everybody to feel sorry for her. She understands there's more basketball to play. She's doing everything she can right now so that she can be in the building tomorrow. They're taking a cue from that. Obviously, Georgia is a leader for us, Cayla has been a leader for us, Olivia has really stepped up in a leadership role, I thought she played extremely hard in the ACC tournament for us. They worked all year long. We worked to get to this point, and regardless if we're full strength or not, they want to take advantage of this opportunity to play in front of a sold-out crowd in Cassell. We're devastated we don't have one of our main cogs, and Liz's situation is, against a team like Marshall, you want to be able to counter their strength with your strength. You look at it, you can say, okay, yeah, they're going to get after you, but when you got a six-six center to throw the ball inside to, an All-American, that's going to take a lot of their pressure away. But also she was, Liz's presence for us is not just a point, but she's a terrific rebounder. She was the main cog in our defense. We would push people to her and she would contest, but also be able to rebound. Then she just has so much confidence, but I'm really confident that our kids are ready to step up and play in her absence and the expectations are exactly the same for us to go out and win. That's because of the leadership and the confidence that those three, four have displayed.

Q. When you talked about Liz rehabbing, does that mean she's already had surgery or that she's rehabbing from?

KENNY BROOKS: Again, and I respect the hell out of you, and I do, but I love her more. So, everything that I'm doing is saying right now is just so that she can -- I want her to heal properly, physically and mentally. So, you know, I probably gave you a little bit too much information, but that's pretty much all I got.

Q. Marshall is one of the better teams in the country in terms of making 3-pointers, how do you feel about your team's three-point defense going into this game?

KENNY BROOKS: We know it's a concern. Marshall is a fantastic basketball team and the way that they come on the scene and in year one under new leadership has been remarkable. They get out and they play a style that not too many people will play. When I watched, I actually, I didn't watch the JMU game live, but when I read the box score -- I'm not good at calculus, you know, and I looked at that box

score and it looked like calculus to me. Like, I don't know how you go and you force 39 turnovers, but you still win in overtime, it takes overtime to win. I don't know how you get 33 offensive rebounds. I don't know how you get 99 shots in a game. I don't know, I think it was 20 or 30 free throws. Like, that doesn't make sense to me. That's the most unorthodox box score I've ever seen in my life. But that's the way that they play. So you can't sit there and say, hey, they're just defense and you got to worry about defense, defense, defense. All right, they also -- and they took 46 3-pointers in that game. So how do you take 46 3-pointers, 20-some free throws and get 33 offensive rebounds and force 39 turnovers in one game? It just doesn't make sense to me. So we've had to focus on a lot of different things, different parts of the week and, but the three-point shooting is something that we're concerned about.

Q. Last night on Twitter a Kentucky radio host claimed that you were one of the candidates for the Kentucky job, and that you had interviewed for the Kentucky job. Have you talked to Kentucky?

KENNY BROOKS: (Laughing). That's why I'm not on Twitter anymore. I still have my account, but I don't, I don't do it. Like, right now, there is a lot of speculation and talking and whatever. Obviously, if you have success people are interested, but again, my focus is what we're doing right now, how we're doing it. My kids are the most important thing to me. I have not heard that or the radio host or whoever you're talking about, but right now I'm about to go to practice and we're going to go out here and Marshall is the only thing on my mind other than the Hokes.

Q. (No Microphone.)

KENNY BROOKS: I just told you what I said. I have not heard that, and I love your investigative reporting and the way that -- I've known you forever -- and so we'll leave it at that.

THE MODERATOR: All right, Coach, thank you.

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