

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Virginia Tech vs Baylor

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Blacksburg, Virginia, USA

Cassell Coliseum

Virginia Tech Hokies Coach Kenny Brooks Georgia Amooore Cayla King

Media Conference

Q. Baylor, one of the top 10 teams in the country in defending the 3-pointer. As 3-point shooters, does that make you eager to rise to that challenge? Or are you so confident in your team's 3-point abilities that it doesn't matter who you're going up against?

GEORGIA AMOORE: If that's their focus and that's what they want to put their focus on, I like to drive. I think if we settle for 3s and potentially that could be an issue. We have to stay confident and know that we can knock down the 3 but we also have to explore the lanes, get downhill.

I think we showed that in yesterday's game a bit more well balanced all around. When we had 3s we took it, but we did a good job getting downhill. You giveth and you taketh, and we have to be smart and mature with our decision-making.

CAYLA KING: Just knowing we have an inside presence. And we have Clara Strack and we have Rose. And Carleigh got downhill yesterday. Georgia was good at getting downhill. When we have an all-around game that's when we're at our best.

Q. Obviously tomorrow will be the last time you play at Cassell Coliseum in your collegiate careers. What are the emotions going into that? And how do you hope that Tech fans will remember your career?

CAYLA KING: It's easy to say and not think about it. I know it's my last game, but I think we're taking it one game at a time and we want to win and go on to Portland. That's the biggest focus. It's kind of selfish to think about your emotions in the moment.



You've got to think about the team and all the work everyone's put in. Just having a good last one. And I know the fans are going to be there. And I think that's the best part to remember. Cassell is a really fun place to play. They showed out against Marshall, and I know they'll be there tomorrow. That's the biggest thing.

Q. I just got a story from your head coach -- for both of you -- but the story involves Georgia, about Clara Strack and maybe the first or second practice before your trip overseas and Clara had a big block on Georgia --

GEORGIA AMOORE: No she didn't. (Laughter).

Q. This is the story I heard. How have you seen Clara evolve from that young freshman to now? What are the biggest things she's improved on?

GEORGIA AMOORE: For sure, her aggression. And I think she's always had a natural knack for the ball. She has really good reactions. And I think it's fulfilled as the year's gone on.

I actually do remember that play. I think I went down for a layup and she did tip it. She didn't block me. She tipped it. I missed the layup. But I came down and I was, like, ooh, I was just in shock of kind of the way she reacted towards the ball.

I think bigs sometimes, maybe as a freshman, try to be solid or whatever. But she has something about her that she just has good natural instincts.

So that, mixed with this year-long progression of her, getting to work with Coach Brooks but also learning from Liz -- and also I want to add she's not little Liz. She's not Liz Kitley Jr. She's not Liz's little -- no, she's Clara Strack. And she's Clara Strack for a reason.

And when you say her name. Say her name. Don't be calling her little Liz because she's going to fulfill into her own player. She has Liz as a great mentor. I'm sure if my little sister was constantly called Georgia she would be



mad too.

I love my little sister, but I want her to be her own little person. And I want Clara to be her own person and she will be her own person.

Her progression and all that has been incredible. Yes, she has Liz as a great mentor, but I can't wait to see how she continues on throughout her rest of the time in college. But, yes, her progression has been insane so far.

CAYLA KING: I think she's just stepped up. Of course we've had Liz all year. Her playing behind Liz, her minutes were limited. But with Liz out, she's now the main center. And she's played 4 and 5. I think that's pretty crazy for someone at her size to be able to move how she does.

I mean, we've seen little high school clips of her in the locker room. We'll be watching highlights. She brings the ball up the court in high school. I want to see a little bit more of that.

Just like seeing her confidence and stuff. She would block a shot and be straight faced a couple games ago. Now she shows a little bit of emotion. We're trying to get a little more out of her because her blocks are crazy. Proud.

GEORGIA AMOORE: We make her uncomfortable in the best way. We allow her to celebrate her successes and all that because she's very stoic. But she's not. She's stoic to the regular eye, but she's not.

Like Cayla said, we put her highlights on from high school in the locker room and we just sat there and gassed her because just crack a little bit of emotion. Have some fun. She's fun, but she's very shy and stoic.

Q. Obviously Georgia your freshman year, Cayla your sophomore year, you faced Baylor in the NCAA Tournament. How fresh does that sit in the memory? What does it mean now to defend Cassell as opposed to have to go play them on their home court?

GEORGIA AMOORE: I think bi-monthly we joke about that game. It's been four years since. But for us we were babies and we played against the likes of Carrington and DiDi. That team was insane. Oh, my gosh.

CAYLA KING: Egbo.

GEORGIA AMOORE: And obviously Coach Mulkey was there. But that game for me was a defining factor. Playing against those girls and seeing them and the elite standard that they held themselves to, that was eye opening for me. And I think last year as well we were like a 1 seed. We

were in that position. So I think it really fulfilled itself.

Obviously still got a bad taste in my mouth from the Baylor loss. We joke about it. We think about it. But it's a completely different team, different coaching. It's just the same uniform, I guess.

CAYLA KING: I'd say it's like a full-circle moment. That was my first NCAA Tournament. This is my last one. I don't know if they did that on purpose, if it fits the storylines or not. But we're ready no matter who it would be, but it's full circle for it to be Baylor second round in my last tournament.

Q. Georgia, so much was made of the way Marshall defended and did everything yesterday. What stood out to you about the way you guys played defense against them? And another big challenge tomorrow. What do you like about where you guys are on that side of the ball and that end of the court going into that match-up?

GEORGIA AMOORE: I mean, I think we definitely played solid. In yesterday's post-game presser after (indiscernible) made a comment about us maybe not rebounding as well as we could have and maybe they just missed some shots. Definitely something we need to fix.

The thing I was most proud of as a team is we didn't panic. I'm not saying like in-game panic. I mean leading up to it, because everyone was talking about their press. That was the first question that everyone wanted to ask. And we're watching film and they're placing such emphasis on that.

But I think as like a group we just didn't panic. We were made aware of the potential that that press could have had on us and the -- I don't know -- I think we just did a really good job of staying poised and controlled.

And I think going into Baylor obviously they're strong. They play great defense. They're a pressing team. So obviously we have confidence from yesterday. But I think the thing that stands true is our ability to have stayed poised in those moments on court and off.

Q. Both you guys and Baylor are a good rebounding team. I was curious, since Liz went down, what's been the mindset about how to keep this team a good rebounding team even without your leading rebounder, because obviously that still worked out?

GEORGIA AMOORE: During the year our whole focus we did the math and I think we were 0-2 when we didn't outrebound someone, and we were 11-0 when we outrebounded the team. We've known this all year. We

know rebounding is a key factor and whoever wins the rebounding battles are going to win the game.

During the ACC Tournament that was the emphasis. We went into Miami more like whoever wins this rebounding match is going to win the game. And then we lost the rebound count against UVA and against Notre Dame away. So it's no secret it's a massive part of our game and success.

But Baylor is a really good rebounding team. They're really desperate for the ball. And credit to them, but we're just going to have to do a good job tomorrow boxing out and finishing possessions.

Shots go up, we can't relax; they're not just going to give it to us. We just have to crash. We have to put our bodies on the line and play the full 30 seconds.

Q. Baylor's coach mentioned about how they're not just playing against five players. They're playing against 10,005 players because of how much Cassell is going to affect and play a part into this. How does it feel knowing that you guys have such a home-court advantage that it's essentially well known around the league that you're not just playing five people, you're playing five people plus a whole home-court advantage?

CAYLA KING: I mean, I think that was the big reason why we wanted to host this year. We know our fans show out. We know Cassell a tough place to play in.

If you ask a lot of ACC teams they'll agree that Cassell is one of the loudest places and most packed places to play at. But we take pride in that. Our fans, we love seeing them come out. We love the support.

So we just enjoy putting on a show for them. And I think the fact that we can host again this year is just something we're not taking for granted. And we're going to give them a game for sure.

Q. Obviously Clara and Carleigh and Carys, they seem more than comfortable on the stage for their NCAA Tournament debut period. How much does their performances yesterday kind of help kind of build up their confidence that all right this stage is not too big for them, they're more than ready for this moment?

CAYLA KING: I think I mentioned earlier in the presser, the other presser, that they've had a couple of big games this year to get under their belt. It's helped that we've had sold-out games here in Cassell. That wasn't the their first time playing in a huge crowd like that, especially being at

home. It's comfort -- we've been practicing at Cassell, we've gotten plenty of shots up in Cassell.

For them to have a game like they did yesterday is really beneficial for us to keep going on in the tournament. They saw the ball go in the hoop. I think everybody got their hands on the ball. Clara had a phenomenal game. Carleigh had a really good game all around.

For them to have a good first tournament game as a freshman is really big. And we need them going into the tournament.

Q. Have you had a film session yet to see Baylor? Anything jump out at you on film, because obviously this isn't a 13 seed; they're a 5 seed. And they're an AP Top 25 team just like you. They beat Utah and Texas. Anything jump out on film that makes you go, I can see why they're on the same level as you guys?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yeah, they're a great team. You look at their stats. They're very equal scoring. They all present opportunities. And as I said, rebounding is a massive thing for them. Defense is a massive thing for them. But they're a very well-coached and well-rounded team.

It's a testament to them for sure. It will be a great match-up. I'm excited to play them because they are good. It's going to be a good challenge.

I've watched some of their games here and there throughout the year, just as a casual fan not because I was scouting them. I have no idea that this was going to happen. Enjoyed watching them play.

Their point guard play is really good. Obviously we played against Jada Walker last year in Kentucky, sorry, in the Bahamas when she played for Kentucky. As I said, just well-coached, well-rounded, equal scoring.

CAYLA KING: Same what Georgia said, any given night anyone can be a leading scorer for them. We have to make sure we lock in on every person. Everybody has to know everybody can be switched off. Just focusing on ourselves and making sure we control the tempo and play at our pace, I think, is just going to be the biggest thing for us.

Q. They're one of the better teams in the country defending the 3-pointer, what do you see on film that can explain the good of that and how it might be a factor tomorrow?

KENNY BROOKS: They really guard the perimeter very

well, and not just the 3-pointer, but they put pressure on you. And I think if you allow it, it will affect your rhythm of your offense. So they do a really good job. Obviously Andrews, strong guard. Walker, quick guard. And then they have kids who are long and athletic. So they do a really good job. I don't know for sure, but it's probably their philosophy to make sure they contest 3. They do a really good job of that. I think it starts with the pressure they put on you and the perimeter to try to really throw you off rhythm.

Q. I remember that Baylor game a couple years ago. I know it's a different Baylor regime. But that was when you guys were still kind of trying to break through. So what did you think from a full circle standpoint, and what do you remember about your team against Baylor and compare that to now?

KENNY BROOKS: That's actually a signature game with this group. If you ask Liz and Georgia and Cayla, that game right there taught us what we needed to be to get to this level. And we walked in. I remember we played that game. We were in the bubble, and we had to share like a big gym before we went out to warm up. They bopped in there with music blasting. They had so many veterans who went to the WNBA, and you could just tell it was a different confidence level.

I think the first play when we threw a pass in to Liz it got blocked and I looked at my assistants. I said which one blocked it. They said both of them. But it just set the tone. And our kids, probably one of the longest games that I've ever been associated with. But it was a very important game because our kids remembered that game.

And I remember one time, I think it was DiDi Richards, she was guarding Georgia. She came off and she read a play we were doing. She tipped the ball away and it came to me. And DiDi said to me, run that again, Coach. I got it next time.

I remember the confidence they had. And obviously it's a totally different team, totally different team, but our kids remembered that, but what we took from that was, okay, if you want to be that level, you've got to have confidence like that. And we knew how hard we needed to play and compete to get to that level.

It was a signature game for us. Signature game for us. And they remember it vividly. So do I.

We refer back to it sometimes. But it's kind of a full-circle moment that we're hosting Baylor during their tenure.

I think Sara, I think Andrews is the only one that was with

that group. And Mulkey came up to me after the game and she said that was the best game we played all year. And she said -- I had a mask on. I had a mask on. And behind me she said behind that mask I know you're smiling because you're really good. You just got babies. She said your kids are just baby. Georgia was a freshman, and Liz was a sophomore. Everyone was sophomores. I remember that, we took a lot from that. We grew up from that.

Q. We had talked last night about how I really felt like the Marshall game was really a coming out party for Carleigh and Clara Strack. How important is it for them to continue on that path and really just kind of play as loose and have as much fun as they did against Marshall?

KENNY BROOKS: It's very important. Obviously they're thrust into situations where they have to have more prominent roles, especially Clara. We have every bit of confidence in Clara. A lot of people want to refer to Clara as Baby Liz or Little Kitley.

But Clara is Clara. We're not asking her to be anyone but Clara Strack, and she's pretty good at doing that. We understand she doesn't have the experience that Liz has, but we still have confidence in here, and throwing the ball inside to her and getting her into positions where she can be successful. I'm excited because we can actually get back to some of the plays we were running before, and like today I was so giddy because I'm like, okay, let's run this play. We haven't run it in probably four or five weeks.

We have a lot of confidence in her. And Carleigh stepped up. I think I referred to it she's played like a big girl yesterday. And she was just so poised and I was very proud of her.

Both of them get their opportunities. They were kind of sporadic throughout the year. But it was rightfully so because they're playing behind two All-Americans, but they're also able to learn.

Hopefully down the stretch they'll take that experience and they'll be big for us. They have to be big for us in order for us to advance, because I told everyone -- I said, there's no bad teams left. By the time we start playing, there's going to be 32 of us. So everyone's going to be good, so you have to be good.

Q. You have had to play a lot of different people who haven't had that many minutes this season. As the minutes have increased for those girls, is there anyone who you would hand the most improved to?

KENNY BROOKS: All of them. Yesterday I was so proud of all of them. We just did a big group hug after the game. I was so proud of all of them. A lot of people don't understand in that moment, on that stage, yesterday, we had two players that had played in the NCAA Tournament. And that was Georgia and Liz. And ironically both of them were in foul trouble the whole time.

So we were playing essentially with kids who were doing it for the very first time. We were doing it with freshmen. We were doing it with transfers who came here so that they can play in the NCAA Tournament.

The way that they responded, I mean, I can't tell you I've been more proud of a group. They never got shellshocked. They never looked at the moment like it was really, really big. Sometimes you can go -- I've had kids before where you play in your first NCAA game and there's nobody there or the crowd is maybe sparse because you're not playing against a home team or whatever the case may be.

But that place was packed. And bless their heart, Marshall fans tried to "let's go, Herd" and I think that made the Hokie fans mad, that place was about to erupt. The two teams were chanting. If that don't get you fired up nothing will. But they kept their composure throughout. I was proud of all of them. I can't give it to one, but they all stepped up and did a wonderful job.

Q. So much was made about the way Marshall played, but I thought something that maybe wasn't talked about enough was your defense. What did you like about throughout the entire game, the poise on that end of the floor and going into another big one tomorrow, what do you like about how you guys are playing on the defensive end?

KENNY BROOKS: I was very pleased with our defensive effort. They followed the scout, and that's when we're pretty good. That's what we do well. We follow the scout. We're not going to go out and force 24 turnovers a game. We're not going to go out and really take away a lot, but they followed the scout. And yesterday we wanted to funnel Marshall to areas that we wanted them to play in.

We knew that they were very aggressive on the 3-point line. We wanted to make sure we hit high hand on them all the time and contesting the 3-point shot. Forcing them to penetrate, and our length really came into play during that because when they got towards the rim, we stayed with them and we contested the shot without bringing the help defense from the weak side. So we were still in position to rebound the basketball.

And our kids stayed disciplined to that. They didn't play out

of character, and they got some offensive rebounds, which they shoot shots sometimes when you don't think they're going to shoot it. Then there's like wild rebounds. They came up with a lot of those because they were quicker to the basketball. But for the most part, we did exactly what we wanted. We made them shoot the shots we wanted, and that was a testament to them following the defensive principles we set for that game.

So, yes, I was very pleased with our defense.

Q. Obviously these guys are not a 13 seed like Marshall AP Top 25 team like you. Beat people like Utah and Texas. What jumps out to you on film to kind of explain, oh, maybe you see something and go, okay, they're on the same level as you guys?

KENNY BROOKS: They are. We've kind of -- I don't know what the committee was thinking, but it was probably Blacksburg or Waco, and so you understand the -- I don't know -- the evenness of both of the teams in our seasons and whatnot.

Nicki does a tremendous job with that group. She's got big shoes to fill and she's done it very nicely and that team, they're a feisty team and they have some transfers who fill the roles. And they're very experienced. They're experienced where they need to be, and the guard spots, those kids, Andrews, the fifth-year senior, Walker is battle tested. Played in the SEC and in the Big 12.

They have kids coming off the bench that are really good. And so they're poised. They understand it. They're strong. They're physical. It's going to be a battle, and these are instances where you wish you had a 6'6" All-American available. Because I think that would have really given us an advantage in certain areas. But we don't. We don't. The expectation is no different. We're going to go out there. We feel like we put our game plan into use and we execute it. Then we give ourselves a tremendous chance to win.

Q. Cayla King will play at Cassell Coliseum final time in her career tomorrow. How would you define her legacy over five years?

KENNY BROOKS: Underrated. She's been my security blanket for the last three, four years. And she proves that your importance shouldn't be judged by how many points you score, how many rebounds you get.

That kid is very, very important not only for culture building, just dependability, and she's just the ultimate student-athlete. She's done so much for this program, it's remarkable because I don't know if people would have

said, okay, coming out of high school Cayla King is going to be a main cog to take a program to the top of the ACC. We believed in her. She believed in us. She's not always perfect, but she's that player on the floor. She's extremely smart, intelligent. She can be another coach on the floor, and she's just morphed into something that a lot of people didn't expect but we knew she could be and has been very valuable to us.

So when you talk about, when you talk about their legacy, you're going to talk about Elizabeth Kitley and I'm sure her jersey will hang in the rafters one day. Georgia Amoore's should be right beside it.

I don't think Cayla's will be hanging beside it because it's based on numbers, but her importance to this team was every bit Liz's and Georgia's and their contributions.

Q. The Baylor coach said by far this is the loudest place she's ever been for a basketball game. She said it's not going to be a lot of green and gold in the stands. Just your thoughts about that because a while back, I remember you keep saying, hey, we couldn't even give away tickets. It's like now everybody wants one. And the ticket prices, just seeing how this has exploded here?

KENNY BROOKS: It's one of the things I'm most proud of throughout my tenure as a basketball coach being a father of three daughters being a women's basketball coach, watching how these young women work and their dedication to the sport, to their fan bases, they deserve better.

And we've been fighting it for a long time. And for me, you know, as a former men's basketball player and men's basketball coach and you get to see it and watch the kids experience those, the atmosphere on the men's side and then when I switched over to the women's side, I learned that the women worked as hard or harder, and they deserve the same.

And to watch them go out and it's really disheartening to see your team go to a men's game and it's packed, and then they go out to play and then it's not.

And I've always said that if you have a passionate fan base like we do at Virginia Tech and it is basketball, you should come out and support both teams because have Virginia Tech women's basketball is Virginia Tech. And it's basketball.

And what we've done here is obviously we recruited to Virginia Tech, kids who are going to represent Virginia Tech extremely well. They're going to love the Hokies, go

out and play. I think the community has really fallen in love with our kids as people, and it makes them really come out and play.

And then you get here and then you're, like, man, this is a beautiful brand of basketball. It's fun. It's fun and exciting to watch Georgia Amoore grow into an All-American. Fun to watch Elizabeth Kitley grow into an All-American, then go to Kroger or Target, you feel you can touch them and talk to them because they're normal kids.

I think those are recipes to building it. And we've done that. And you get the backing from the places that you need to get the backing from, and this is what it can be.

And that's what it has become, and it's a lot of cool moments, because I've coached. I've played -- I played here in Cassell. And they were booing me every time I touched the ball and I didn't know why. But the place was loud. Now to be on the other side of it, it just makes you feel good because my young ladies, they work hard. They work so hard and they deserve this.

Now they're being able to just be in it, it's something that they'll always remember, and it just makes you proud.

Q. Katie Meyer announced her retirement a couple days ago). She was the longest tenured head coach in the ACC. As somebody who came into this league in 2016 and I know you -- seems like you and Katie had a great relationship. What has she meant to you and meant to the ACC?

KENNY BROOKS: You know, Katie is -- we're going to miss Katie. The basketball, the women's basketball world is going to miss Katie. The ACC is going to miss Katie. She wasn't only a tremendous coach, she was a tremendous person. But she was a tremendous advocate for women's basketball. Just sitting in meetings with her and the ideas that she has, the passion that she shows, I learned so much. I learned so much from her, and competing against her was a joy because we would compete against each other and we would try to beat each other up and then as soon as the game was over with, the most genuine conversations that I could have with her. She was one of the very first coaches that welcomed genuinely welcomed me into this league, and I appreciated it and I appreciated it still.

And we were actually in Greece, me and my wife. They were there. Her and her wife. And we got to sit down and talk and just every time I see her wife she gives me a big hug. She sees my wife she gives her a big hug. It's like she's more than just a coach, and when I say this league is going to miss her and women's basketball is going to miss

her, I haven't talked to her yet. But I'm sure I hope she's happy, and obviously she made this decision for herself. But she's very, very special to us.

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