

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

Friday, March 20, 2026

Austin, Texas, USA

Moody Center

## Virginia Tech Hokies Coach Megan Duffy Mackenzie Nelson Carys Baker

Media Conference

Oregon 70, Virginia Tech 60

MODERATOR: We're going to start with an opening statement from Coach Duffy. Then we'll go to questions for the players only. After they're finished, they'll be dismissed.

MEGAN DUFFY: Just first and foremost, congratulations to Oregon. I thought they came out of the gates with a lot of confidence and really attacked us on the defensive end. So great job by them.

Secondly, I'm just really, really just so proud of our team. Today was not the best over the course of 40 minutes, but the way each one of them have grown and really shaped and molded this year from the summertime to now has been a joy.

While today is disappointing, having Mackie and Carys here to help lead us, along with Carleigh and Leila Wells and our seniors, just really excited about what they've done this season.

**Q. Mackie, what about their defense, I think you guys shot 31 percent from the field today. What about their defense made it so hard to score against them?**

MACKENZIE NELSON: Yeah. They're a good defensive team. They're physical, and they were connected all game. I think that made it difficult. But I think a lot of it was us. We missed easy shots, easy put-back layups, easy pull-ups that we always make. I think we got a little razzled in the beginning, and I think we calmed down a little bit, and they kind of made another run and we weren't



able to fight back.

So I think it was more us, but I mean, credit to them. They're a really good team, really good defensive team, and they got the better of us today.

**Q. Carys, they went on that big run in the start of the third quarter right after halftime. What kind of changed because you guys had just gone on that big run to kind of end the second quarter?**

CARYS BAKER: Like Mack said, they're a really good team. I think they just capitalized on a lot of our mistakes, and then we just didn't really close that gap. So I think it just started on our defense. Obviously the second quarter was huge, with me and Carleigh out. I think the girls really picked it up, but then in the third quarter, like I said, we just made a couple of mistakes, and we weren't able to communicate fast enough what was going on.

I think we picked it up a little bit in the fourth quarter, and we wanted to end the game with a little more fight than we had in the third quarter. So I think they capitalized a lot on what we weren't doing.

**Q. Mackie, what made their offense so tough to handle out of the gates and what did you feel like you guys did better as the game wore on?**

MACKENZIE NELSON: I just don't think we came ready to play. We talked about the physicality of 35. And I think we had a few missed lapse on that, and then I think with 2 and their guards, we had a lot of easy switches and easy possibilities to make easy plays on the defensive end and we just didn't.

I think that was a little bit of lack of communication, maybe a little bit of nerves. I don't know what the reason was. But I think that kind of made it hard for us defensively. And like I said, we bounced back a little bit. We had our runs, but we just didn't have enough fight in us today.

**Q. Carys, overall what made their offense hard to guard today?**



CARYS BAKER: I mean, they're a really good team. I think it was also a lot of our mistakes, like Mackie said, a lot of the things that we were confidently communicating during the season we weren't today for some reason. So I think that was definitely part of it.

I think, like I said, their offense is strong, but I think it was a lot on us, too. We have to put that on our shoulders and just talk about the fact that we just had a lot of miscommunication, a lot of missed box-outs and rebounds. I think that was huge, too. It gave 35 a lot of confidence when she was putting back her own misses. So I think that was just some things that we could have cleaned up that started to gain their confidence on things that we were doing.

**Q. And, Carys, obviously most of your team is set to come back next year. Do you feel like this season and the success you had kind of gives you guys something to build upon for next year?**

CARYS BAKER: Yeah. We're super excited, obviously. It's going to be hard. We're focused on this right now. It's a tough loss and for our seniors Mel and Kilah I know they're feeling it, so that's definitely where we're going to put our focus right now is just on them and just making sure that they're okay, because I know this was hard. This was their last game, and it's hard to go out like that.

So we're just excited right now and we're super grateful to be in the position that we were in today just to be here, and then we're just going to be able to celebrate our seniors going out. They've done a lot for us, Mel Daley and Kilah Freelon, they've done numbers for us this year and we wouldn't have been in the position that we're in without them. So I think that's what we're just celebrating today is just our seniors and just the season that we had. It was hard, but I mean, there's a lot of things that happened this year for us to be able to be in this position.

**Q. Mackie, Mel kind of got you guys going a little earlier in the first half and Kayl and Sophie both came in and and hit some big threes. When you're dealing with foul trouble, how much did their help give you a little bit of a lift at times?**

MACKENZIE NELSON: Yeah. I think everyone saw it in the second quarter with Carleigh and Carys out, other people stepped up and I think that's the name of the game, and I think that just shows the toughness of our team.

Sophie hit some big shots. Kayl came in with a big charge, some rebounds, that big 3-2. Same thing with Mel, right? I think we have seen it all year in spurts, and obviously Carleigh and Carys are our go-to scorers, but when they're

not scoring, other people step up, and I think it was cool to see that today. And that's the future of this Virginia Tech women's basketball team, right. I mean, obviously Mel won't be here next year, but you see people like Kayl, like Leila, like myself step up in those moments when the lights are shining, and I think that's really cool to see.

**Q. I know obviously this isn't the result you guys wanted, but how will you kind of remember this group, the fun you guys had, the ups and downs and making an NCAA Tournament, when you guys have an opportunity to kind of take it all in?**

MACKENZIE NELSON: Yeah. I think that we're a fun group. We love each other, and I don't know if every women's basketball team around the country can say that, inside and out. It was a really good run. I think that we proved a lot of people wrong all year long. Making the tournament is always going to be, I think, a memory for every single person in that room when we heard our name get called, and being able to have a fighting chance all year.

We had our ups, we had our downs. We had good games. We had some games that we didn't really like. But something I could say is we fought all year.

Even if we had a good win, we came back in the gym, stayed humble. Even after bad losses, we got in the gym, we watched the film and we came back together. And I don't think that's something to hang our heads on. There's a lot tonight that we could have worked on, but looking back at the year, we did a lot of good things to be proud of and just hang our hats on that.

We're going to get back in the gym, we're going to take our time off. We're going to do all that, but I think that's the main thing just how tough we were all year and just continue it on for next year.

**Q. Same thing I asked Carys. Most of the people that played in this game are coming back. Does that leave you kind of encouraged for the promise for next year?**

MACKENZIE NELSON: Yeah, absolutely. And I think what you saw this past year, right, me, Carys, Carleigh, Leila, Kayl, Samyha all grew. We grew a lot from one season to the next. We added pieces. We added freshmen, and I think we're going to do that next year.

Every single person on this team is going to grow and we're going to add new pieces. It's not going to look the same because I can't promise you we're going to find another Kilah who runs the floor as hard as she does, another Mel who has that contested mid-range shot that I'll

always question. But, I mean, we're not going to replace those people, but we're going to find new people.

New freshmen are going to step up and the freshmen that you didn't really get to see this year are going to step up. We got Kate coming back, and I think that's just something to look forward. And, like I said, the growth of all these people, like, we haven't hit the ceiling yet. Like we're going to keep growing leadership wise, on, off the court, all of it and we're going to continue to fight each and every day.

**Q. Carys, you had 17 in the final fourth quarter. What did you find in terms of your rhythm? What did you like about kind of the shots you were getting down the stretch?**

CARYS BAKER: Yeah. I think my first half was definitely hard for me. I was in foul trouble. I was a little bit shaky in that first quarter. So I think just going back to what I know, and I think just having the girls around me that I have, like, obviously I have a really good point guard, I've said it before in the press conference. Mackie is a really good point guard, so I think her just finding me and then just building that confidence. Like I just went back to what I know. Like I said, like, I mean, I can I can shoot the ball, and I think in the beginning I kind of questioned that a little bit, but I think just, like I said, the support I have around me, I don't think in that second half I questioned a single shot that I took and I don't think they did either.

So I think that was definitely something, and they kept finding me. And obviously like not the outcome that I wanted. I wanted to obviously win the game and have a huge fourth quarter and be able to win that game. But like I said, the support that I had from those girls. Even all season they've just been supporting me with everything. Mack has been finding me, Carleigh, Leila, Samyha, all of them have just been huge for me. And just to have guards like that that you play with, not a lot of people can say that they have such amazing guards around them that are able to find them like that.

So I think it's honestly just props to my teammates. I'm going to give all the props to Mackie and Carleigh and Samyha and Leila. They just work so hard at that guard position, and I think it just makes my job a whole lot easier than what you see on the court.

Obviously you don't see the work that they put in, so I think they just make my job a lot easier, and I really appreciate them.

MODERATOR: All right. We can open it up for questions for Coach, please.

**Q. Megan, after that good second quarter you guys had to get back in the game, what was different when they went on that 18-0 run in the third quarter?**

MEGAN DUFFY: I mean, I thought our bench stepped up for us in the second quarter. We got some good momentum, cut a double-digit deficit to six. And even the locker room at halftime we were really encouraged by just we tightened up our defense a little bit, celebrated some players Mel, Kayl, who really stepped up for us, and then the mindset of getting Carleigh and Carys back.

It's tough because I thought we had good momentum going into the third quarter. And I think between the first and third quarter we kind of got beat at the same stuff. I thought we had some bad timing on guarding their high-low. I thought we let 35, Etute, catch the ball in the best position where she just has to turn and finish.

I thought we had a couple of cheap fouls within that in both quarters. I thought, even at the beginning of the game, we were a step slow on some of the things we worked on, and you never know what that is. Is it nerves, is it looks a little different from film to live play. I thought we fouled because we were a step slow position wise.

And so I thought the first and third quarter were very similar with how we got beat tactically in the basketball side.

And then obviously the second and fourth were a little bit more like us and we found some grit and some determination with it.

**Q. And as far as Oregon's defense, what were they doing today to give, obviously not Carys and Mel, but the rest of the team they did a really good job guarding you guys. What was the problem for them?**

MEGAN DUFFY: We were concerned going into the game with their defense. They have a different couple ways they play their man-to-man. Sometimes it's using their length to disrupt. Sometimes they're getting out in passing lanes, different facets with their man. They got two different zones and a press.

So we tried to pack in as much as we could in three days of preparation and even some stuff the week before to really counter that. And I thought we were just a little rushed on some of our layups, some short jumpers that I thought we could take a pull-up and we went all the way to the rim. So just maybe a little bit off that way.

One of the things with our team that I would say we've struggled at times is when we do miss a couple shots, it can impact your defense, and I thought in those segments

in the second -- or in the first and third quarter we were just a step slow maybe thinking about it too much and then not getting a stop on the other end.

But we knew going in, I think that's why they've been successful this year, other than Fiso and Etute just being studs, their defense has really kept them in games and allowed them to go on different types of runs in a game.

And I thought they hurt us a couple different ways, whether that was length, some of their switches, blowing up some easy stuff we did.

**Q. I asked them, but Kayl coming in hitting a big three, Sophie helped you guys late. Mel obviously when you guys were in so much foul trouble early with Carys and Carleigh, how big were they kind of giving you guys a lift and pulling you within two going into halftime?**

MEGAN DUFFY: Yeah. They were great. It was interesting because in our ACC game we lost to North Carolina. We had some similar foul trouble in the second quarter, and our bench didn't play quite as well. So to see them step up in a huge moment in the NCAA Tournament was phenomenal, whether that was one of our sophomores, Mel coming off the bench as a senior, whether it was taking a charge or getting a big bucket, it was huge, and I think that's the frustrating part to watch those women step up in that second quarter. You want to take that momentum into the beginning of the third quarter when you don't need to worry about foul trouble anymore; you need to go play the game.

So we'll take a look at that. I always say the hard part is you can take a look at it, but you don't get to fix it tomorrow.

But from the standpoint of, like you mentioned, that group of women who really stepped up for little things for us in that second quarter was awesome.

**Q. How will you kind of remember this season, this group? Year two you guys make the NCAA Tournament, won 12 ACC games. How proud are you of how they've come to together and weathered the highs and lows all year?**

MEGAN DUFFY: Yeah, this has been such a fun group to coach and. I don't know, like Mackie said, if every head coach can say that about their team. They make me laugh every day. They drive my crazy other days.

They're really good young women that are trying to figure out how to build a program and love each other day, but push each other every day. And that's been the most fun

of just being around them.

And from the basketball side we still had players in new roles this year trying to figure out how to, like Mackie Nelson, be a little bit better point guard than you were last year, and she exceeded that. And Carleigh and Carys with the weight of the world on their shoulders some day, just helping them navigate through that. It's been fun.

And their hearts are always in the right place. And even, it was funny, we were down it felt like a million, but I said, if anything, we get out of this fourth quarter, let's end this game with playing our hearts out. Now, would we have loved to do it the whole 40 minutes? Absolutely. I think a little bit of this game is a microcosm of our season where we had those dips, those highs, those low moments, but they fought like heck the last 10 minutes of the game to cut it.

And I'd like some different possessions back, but they fought for us. They believe in each other. They've believed in our staff. They wear the responsibility of Hokie Nation very proudly on their shoulders and their back.

And I always say, it's fun, because these two here, you're going to see one as a broadcaster, one as a doctor some day. We have engineers. We have a whole gamut of kids who truly are the epitome of a student-athlete. So I can't be too mad at them the way they fight for each other and for Virginia Tech.

**Q. When you were able to withstand that second quarter, were you pretty confident going into the second half thinking, okay, we got this, because you were missing players in the second quarter?**

MEGAN DUFFY: Absolutely. We celebrated it. We pumped up the kids who gave us a couple big moments in that second quarter, and I think the thing that you know as a coach everybody is making adjustments at halftime, though.

I think, again, we were a step slow in a little bit of their high-low, and we fouled. And I don't even think we fouled aggressively. It was just kind of a step off, and then we reach and they gotta call it.

We took a few punches in that third quarter, and it shook us a little bit where the game was out of hand.

**Q. Same thing I was asking the players there. With so many of the team poised to come back next year, do you feel like this is kind of a good stepping stone, something to build upon for next year?**

MEGAN DUFFY: I hope so. This is an interesting world with college basketball. We know all the external things that are going around us. And I think our two here hit it on the head. Like we want to be together and celebrate the season, and we're extremely disappointed.

That locker room was hard to be in, just the disappointment and the tears. But we have a lot of good pieces back.

We're so appreciative of what Kilah and Mel did for us, the seniors coming in in their last year, just one year. It's not an easy thing when you transfer in for just one year. We're just really grateful for what they've done for us.

Yeah, then we'll reset ourselves and talk about next year, and I think there's a lot of growth. Like I think Mackie said it perfectly, there's another step we can get to with their individual games, but we gotta keep them together, and our coaching staff and that core will hopefully work hard to do that.

But we gotta take a few minutes just to make sure we take care of the seniors and not look too far ahead or too far in the past of what this season has been about and stay in the moment today.

**Q. Is that the next step for you is if you can be even better next year, you can get a better seed and have maybe a game where it's easier to advance than being in an 8-9 game?**

MEGAN DUFFY: Yeah, I think that's always been the thing as a coach. You want to get in the tournament, and then you want to get your seeding right, and there's all these things. But this is a different time in college basketball. You have no guarantees the next year what your roster is going to look like, who's going to be back. There's a financial piece in all this.

The old-school way when I got in was, yeah, it's like, okay, how do you build a team that can get in, and then what's your seeding and how do you win a game and how do you get out of that first weekend. The crazy person in me is I want to get to a Final Four and win a National Championship, but there is minute details that have to happen and be in place to build your roster the right way.

And so I guess, like I said, that's the old way of looking at it, but we have to just go very small steps at a time. And I'm not the coach that's going to sit here and have some dream forecast ahead.

I think we got the right people in the room in the locker room. We got the right leaders. And, again, we're going to take the positive things that happened and keep that

momentum and then I'll guarantee you something from me, I'm going to try everything I can to fix the things that didn't go well.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports #