

NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - Georgia Tech vs Richmond

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Los Angeles, California, USA

Pauley Pavilion

Richmond Spiders

Coach Aaron Rousell

Addie Budnik

Maggie Doogan

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Joining us is head coach Aaron Rousell and student-athletes Addie Budnik and Maggie Doogan.

AARON ROUSELL: Obviously very thankful, grateful to be here. Kudos to the committee. I thought just a fantastic bracket. Didn't really know where we'd be, where we'd be seed-wise. Felt like we had a schedule and kind of did everything that we thought was asked of schools like us at this level to have this chance.

If you were forced or weren't fortunate enough to get the AQ to be an at-large consideration, I wanted to make sure that the schedule was not going to be the reason we wouldn't have a chance. So we were able to do that.

Big thanks to our administration -- president all the way down to athletic director and everybody else for allowing us to do that. And then our players seizing that opportunity. I think it's just been a really special group.

Obviously when you look back at a season, it can always feel long, but in some ways it feels like, oh, my gosh, are we really at the end. I don't think this is a group that's ready to be done. I don't think this is a group that's counting the days.

So I think we're all very fortunate, very grateful to have this opportunity to be sent to sunny LA. I'd say the weather cooperated, but I think the weather always cooperates out here.

It's a cool spot for it. And seeing our players and how much they enjoyed the reveal. And for it to happen right



away, for it to go to LA, the match-ups aside, but I think to be able to be sent to a cool destination like this was the first excitement. And looking forward to seeing what we can pull off here this weekend.

Q. Just having gone through this last year playing Duke, what did you learn about just the stage of the NCAA Tournament that you can take into this season?

ADDIE BUDNIK: I mean just being here and being selected, we're super thankful for the opportunity, but also having that experience and knowing that it's going to be a physical game. It's going to be an intense atmosphere.

It was just a real cool opportunity last year. And never being there before, it's kind of like you didn't know what to expect. But now we have those expectations and know what it's going to feel like. So we're really excited for the opportunity tomorrow.

MAGGIE DOOGAN: I would say the same as Addie.

Q. When you've won 17 games in a row, you haven't lost since New Year's Day, you got a lot of momentum going and then you lose a heartbreaker like how you did. How does it affect you? Does it shake you up, or does the fact that you've done so well the past two months allow you to shake it off because you know who you are and what you've been able to accomplish?

MAGGIE DOOGAN: I think the loss definitely hit a little harder because of what it was. Obviously being the A10 Tournament. And chasing the championship hit a little harder.

But I think having the 17-game win streak in the back of our minds kind of give us the confidence that we've played really good teams and we've beaten really good teams so we can do the same while we're here.

Q. You guys played a schedule that got you in here. You had those three games that were really tough right before the holidays -- Texas, Tennessee, Alabama in the tournament in West Palm. What did playing those



games teach you guys and to make you a better team, even though you came up short?

ADDIE BUDNIK: I think all of our games besides Tennessee, we were a little further away from them, but all of them were super competitive. We know we can compete at that level, match their physicality when we play together. We can compete with anyone. We're just really looking forward to this weekend and be able to hopefully make some noise.

Q. We saw the reaction from the video when you guys got selected to come all the way out here. What's it like being so far from the West Coast? Get to do anything fun yet? How has it been?

MAGGIE DOOGAN: It's been really cool. The culture is really different on the West Coast. We went to the Santa Monica Pier yesterday. And walking around town, seeing everything, it's been a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. And it's really cool. We're enjoying it.

Q. Just the first reaction that you guys have walking into this arena, seeing the March Madness logos and everything that has for this time of year?

ADDIE BUDNIK: I mean any games in March, it's a great opportunity. We're just really thankful to be here, especially being in such a historic place and gym, just walking in, taking it all in.

I think everybody just kind of stopped like at the entrance of the gym, just either taking a photo or just taking a moment to really take a deep breath and understand that this is a really special place to be in. And we're just really thankful for this opportunity.

MAGGIE DOOGAN: I mean, seeing the March Madness logos definitely gives me some excitement just to be here. This is something you dream about when you're a kid growing up. And being able to make this a reality is something that I definitely looked forward to. And it's just a really cool thing.

Like Addie said, being at UCLA, this historic venue is something really cool, and not something I thought I'd ever be able to do. I'm going to take it all in.

Q. How special is this experience to share for another season with a lot of the same teammates that you had last year in Columbus?

ADDIE BUDNIK: Obviously, like I said earlier, it's a bit of a different feel because we have been here before, but honestly that special feeling of just walking in, like, didn't go

away at all. It was that same, wow, this is incredible and just super cool.

So I think it's a different group and some haven't been here before, so being able to see them come in for the first time as well was super cool.

Q. This is the first at-large bid for Richmond, but you guys are looking for your first-ever NCAA Tournament win. What would it mean to be part of the team that gets that first NCAA Tournament win?

MAGGIE DOOGAN: It would be an incredible feeling. I feel like we've done a lot of firsts this year, but I think this would obviously top everything, just being with this kind of group that we worked so hard and we've been through so much that we just want to play for each other, we want to play for the coaches, we want to play for the university. So I think that all be a very cool thing to do.

Q. Top 20 offense your team another top 20 offense in Georgia Tech. You get to your spots very differently, though. What stands out to you about the way they run their offense?

AARON ROUSELL: First off, I think the coaching, obviously, you have a legend on the bench on the other side of it. And doing homework a little bit, now that we're doing a little bit more of a deep dive, it does look like they're playing differently than they were last year. Maybe a little bit more modern.

You said in different ways than us, but you do see some similarities in the way they're trying to space the floor and still get shots at the arc. But I just think they have really elite kids that can get their own shot. So the athleticism, the things that they can do with the ball in their hands, the ball handling, just we probably are creating shots in different ways.

I think with us it's a little bit more fluid -- a little more cutting and stuff off the ball. They have kids that distribute the ball really well. I think that was something that stood out when you see their one-on-one abilities, you see a lot of teams play this way and it's just that's really hard to guard. They don't turn the basketball over.

And on top of that, they get a lot of assists. You don't see that a lot. So if she's willing, that's probably a conversation I'd love to have with coach in the offseason of how they're able to do that, because I do think they do a really good job.

Morgan coming off the ball screens, I think she's elite with that. Her shot creation for herself, the shots she gets for



other people. It's been fascinating for us to watch this week.

It's a very formidable match-up for us, maybe a little uncomfortable, but I think also for as much as people talked about our offense, I think our defense has been really good especially at different times throughout the year. We've got to be at a high level to be able to limit them a little bit.

Q. How did this team react to its first loss in two months?

AARON ROUSELL: The coach in me wants to say not very well. At first. And I mean that with all respect to our players. I just think they are so highly motivated. There was no entitlement of like, hey, we've won 17 in a row or we won last year, we're supposed to win again.

But I think how badly this team wanted another championship, it's not just these two here, it's not just Addie because she came back in a fifth year, I think the level of pride they have in this university and in this program, they wanted that for our fans. Our fans have been incredible. They so badly wanted to celebrate that with fans.

The love they have for the kids that were not on the team last year of how much they saw us celebrate last year, how cool it was, they wanted that so bad for the rest of our team.

And then the scheduling for us, it was spring break. We had to still give our kids a little bit. We had to bring them back. Wanted to give them a little longer weekend this past weekend. That first practice on Tuesday after the loss was hard, and we've talked about that as a team.

Again, I mean that I could flip it around as a compliment to our players about how much it hurts. If it didn't hurt, you'd be concerned as a coach. It probably wasn't the best practice. They'll be the first to tell you. Maybe I wasn't the best on Tuesday, but I think we learned from that.

And there's so many people that talked about during that streak, especially when you had the thing, the league clinched as far as the outright title and the No. 1 seed, we still had a pretty tough schedule that last week of the season.

I understand where people said, hey, maybe a loss would benefit us, but we weren't buying into that. I think part of that was knowing the strength of the conference, if you did lose in the conference tournament, you still wanted to have a chance at the at-large.

You never want to lose, but I've always said this as a coach, you learn more valuable lessons and sometimes that's driven home a little bit stronger after a loss.

I think there's been a little bit more different pep in our step since we had a couple of days off middle of the week last week.

Some of that was probably a celebration and eagerness of coming out here playing a new opponent. I think that was a big thing for us, too, of just getting out of the region was a cool thing but also playing somebody that you didn't have a history with. Last year we played Duke. It was the third time we played them, I think, in 13 months or whatever it was. Still cool. There was still a revenge factor. There was still a, hey, we can show how much progress we've made.

Columbus was great. They treated us very well in Columbus, Ohio. But we've often joked that we don't plan spring breaks, right, when you're in this program, you don't plan spring breaks. The NCAA Tournament is our spring break.

Getting shipped off to Los Angeles on the NCAA's dime is pretty cool. A memory here. I think that's kind of reinvigorated things for us in a positive way.

Q. Similar to what I asked the players, playing Texas, Tennessee, Alabama in a row, what did that do for your team?

AARON ROUSELL: I said this after that week, it weirdly gave us some confidence. We played early, too, we beat Fairfield. Played Temple at Temple. Those are under the radar pretty sneaky wins, high quality wins for us. I think we recognized early how good Oklahoma State was. We sat in the locker room and said that's going to be a big-time win and looking at The Net and making sure it's a Quad 1 and Georgetown and others -- Columbia was a fantastic game.

We had a great game with George Mason this year early, one of the best games I've been a part. That Columbia game was there too if you liked coaching, liked offense. We built that, built some confidence.

The Texas game, seeing Vic Schaefer call a timeout with four minutes left in the game because we were one possession away from really kind of making that really tight, I think gave our kids some confidence.

They talked about the Tennessee game getting away from us. It did. Not to sound like we're making excuses, but

there's probably two four-minute stretches, one in each half, you take those away and I felt good about how we played. So we used that.

And Alabama, I think we had a 4-point lead with a couple minutes left. Those are things, as much as it hurts because you knew that would be a valuable win for you, for the program, I think it did give us some confidence. Springboarded us to start conference play.

We didn't have a great night, great night in the Bronx at Fordham. But again going back to your point of the loss against Saint Joe's, I think it did give us -- all of our losses have weirdly strategically, I think, made us better at this point right now and hopefully we can learn a little bit from the Saint Joe's one as well.

Q. Over the last 48 hours, kind of take me through the game plan and getting these players in the right mindset and trying to get the travel time off as well because it's a long distance from Richmond.

AARON ROUSELL: Well, again, you obviously find out where you're going on Sunday night. It takes a lot. There's a lot that goes into the logistics of this. Sometimes you can say this is an operational operations nightmare in some ways. It's just like operations, like everybody's hair is on fire. So it's kind of weirdly fun. I don't think we really knew our travel plans until maybe late Monday night, what time we were flying, maybe even Tuesday, what time we were flying out.

But I think gone through this before, we had contingency plans for, if we're in the play-in game we're playing Wednesday. This is what the week will look like; if we play Thursday, this is what it's going to look like.

For us, we were going to take Tuesday off anyway and kind of hope that would be a travel day. That worked out, practiced yesterday.

We told our players Sunday, you can celebrate this, enjoy this. For us as a staff, it was full planning mode. So we met -- everybody watched their film. We met Monday on Georgia Tech. Six-hour flight allows for a lot of studying and studying for the kids, full study mode on that flight. Then for the staff, a lot of film. It's just really been a lot of that.

Kids mentioned Santa Monica pier. I stayed back on that one, but I was able to take my kid to the Lakers game last night. That was really cool for me and for my family. You didn't realize that was a bucket list item, but this opportunity allowed that.

Today obviously getting on the floor will be great, but there's still a lot that goes into it prep-wise. I don't think there's anybody that you want to play at this point, but I think the more you're watching Georgia Tech, the more you're like, wow, there's a lot of firepower there and there's some great action, some great coaching going on.

Chess match is sometimes a cliché. I think there's a lot of prep going into it as a staff and continue to do it with the staff and see where it falls tomorrow.

Q. What does it mean to you to have those core players from last year and having Addie return for a fifth year as well joining this wild ride?

AARON ROUSELL: I think sometimes when you're there before that following year there's a different vibe when you get to a tournament. I think for the returners, there's nothing that tomorrow will be too big for them. I said that with last year's team too before the tournament.

We had just built to that. Being with successful teams before, I knew going into that A10 tournament that we were at our top even against Duke. There was nothing too big for us. Hadn't been there before, but I knew there was nothing too big for us.

I have that feeling again. But I think so much was, of course, we have that feeling because we have the returners back, led by these two. But Ally Sweeney, I don't know if she even got in the game against Duke last year. I have zero concern with Ally Sweeney tomorrow. She's a gamer and that's what 32 games will do for you. That's what playing Texas and Alabama and Tennessee will do for you. If you've navigated that as a first-time starting point guard, you'll be just fine.

Our key kids coming off the bench have been really, really good players elsewhere and for us. They're starting-caliber players. They haven't been here before, but they're in fifth and sixth years. So I think we get some benefit from that a little bit of an older team.

We're going to enjoy this. We have enjoyed this walking into Pauley Pavilion was a cool thing. I didn't know if it was going to resonate with our kids. It really did. But I think we've talked about it all week: Keep the main thing the main thing. We have some Philly Eagles fans on our team. Ad nauseam, heard too much for me as a Vikings fan. But our focus has been strong all season. I have no reason to think it won't be the same.

Q. The No. 8 seed for you guys is the highest seed an Atlantic 10 school in the NCAA Tournament since GW in 2016. Do you feel this is a sign of the Atlantic 10

getting more national respect or is it a reflection how Richmond has built this program over the last several years, or both?

AARON ROUSELL: I think the easy answer there is both. I think as a league we've known -- I think even going back four, five years ago we had a lot of new coaches in the league. We talked about sense of pride of wanting to build the league this way.

I think we've been very strategic as a group of taking a look at even before The Net an RPI, how can we make advancements. I think our conference administration has been great with that.

I've nerded out a lot over the years and really kind of done the deep dive of how do you get into that net, how do you do this. It's not something you can game, but I think we've tried to figure out schedule and some different things style of play of how to help ourselves.

I think the rest of the league has taken notice. But I think the sense of pride that I think hopefully the league feels but definitely our group felt on Sunday night to see the 8 seed, to be able to wear white was really cool. And I think that's something that will mean something down the road. That's not meaning anything tomorrow.

If anything, that's igniting Georgia Tech we're supposed to wear white. It was a cool thing we talked about on Friday. Had nothing to do with anybody's else's seed but, hey, how cool is it?

We had this blueprint six years ago, and none of us, when we started that blueprint, showed that blueprint were here.

But Addie Budnik was here. She wasn't buying into history or tradition, she was buying into a vision and blueprint we had.

Maggie Doogan started to see some success, maybe jumped on. But there was still buying into a vision. This is where ultimately we wanted to get to. So to have the blueprint kind of come to life here, to have the blueprint validated, I think, is a cool thing, and a notch in the belt for our program but admittedly for the league and was happy that the league was able to get two. Different ways to get there. But to get two. But for Saint Joe's, if they're in the tournament, they're making noise in the tournament too.

Proud of the league that we're in this spot right now.

Q. For people that haven't watched your team as much this year, who do you expect to surprise people or maybe has been impressing you in practice this week?

AARON ROUSELL: Again, I think when you've had the same starting lineup for the most part throughout the season, kind of the players that have done it throughout the year are kind of the ones you count on.

But I think people are surprised when you look at the returners and kind of the four that played a lot of minutes last year. Somebody like Katie Hill can get lost on you because there's maybe not a stat sheet or a column in the stat sheet that can show the impact that she has, whether it's defensively, whether it's just that connector or making the second pass.

I think Ally Sweeney catches people off guard because as a point guard she's different than what we've had success with grace over the years. The kind of break-down offensive player. Ally Sweeney, smart player, incredible shooter. She can break you down more than people realize.

Those guys, the other three with the accolades maybe get some credit that the other two starters maybe have not but they've been equally as important, and I think had some big-time moments for us.

Like I said, the kids off the bench, the core kids off the bench have been new kids for us this year but have played a lot of basketball and had a lot of success at this level.

So it's really been that team thing. I forget the number, but I think early we had six, seven kids that scored over 20 points in a game, 15, 16 games in. That's not happening.

So we have firepower, but I think we've also had some kids -- the key thing is willing to take that step back. Like Anna Camden is not lighting up stat sheets sometimes but she's been essential to what we're doing.

Aly Jimenez off the bench and Faith Alston and Steph, people like that, have been huge for us and they came here to be here on this stage and win as opposed to taking opportunities elsewhere where they could have individually had that shine and gotten those flowers.

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