

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Kentucky vs West Virginia

Sunday, March 22, 2026

Morgantown, West Virginia, USA

Hope Coliseum

**Kentucky Wildcats**

**Tonie Morgan**

**Amelia Hassett**

**Coach Kenny Brooks**

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for our student-athletes first followed by the head coach. We'll open things up with a couple of comments from Coach Brooks first as well. Maybe a reflection on yesterday's big win and how you're preparing for tomorrow's match-up against West Virginia.

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, obviously we're glad to still be here. Very proud of our kids. I thought we had a tremendous performance yesterday. Wasn't always easy but we got off to a tremendous start. They were playing very well together.

These two to my left, Tonie really controlled the tempo of the basketball game and found her teammates all while having the balance of scoring. Amelia hit some really good shots, some really big shots for us to get things open. But I think you also have to credit Amelia's defense on their leading scorer. She did a tremendous job.

It was an all-around effort. Everyone stepped up and had a really good part in the win and in order for us to advance, we're going to have to same kind of contributions. So we're looking forward to the opportunities.

THE MODERATOR: Questions now for our student, Tonie Morgan and Amelia Hassett.

**Q. West Virginia's defense gets a lot of attention. The pressure that they play with. Have you seen others that do that? Tennessee, Mississippi. How difficult is that especially for a point?**

TONIE MORGAN: Yeah, playing in the league that we do,



the SEC, we have seen a lot of pressing defenses. West Virginia is no different. They play a really good defensive state of play. I think we're more than prepared with the season we played so far, so I think we're ready.

**Q. How does that impact you when the pressure comes? Do you have to be a pressure release valve? What's your opportunity responsibility the those things?**

AMELIA HASSETT: Yeah, we talk about breaking the press. We have to all be there. It's not just one person or two people, it's the whole team. Obviously we have been working on that throughout the whole season and just, yeah, continuing to do that tomorrow.

**Q. What were your guys' thoughts with the crowd? Everybody came in for your guys' game yesterday. Now tomorrow it's going to be another big crowd. What was your guys' thoughts behind the energy?**

TONIE MORGAN: It's exciting, of course. You love to play in a big crowd but the SEC has a great crowd every night. It's nothing now for us and we're definitely ready to play in front of a big crowd. We love it.

AMELIA HASSETT: Yeah, definitely what Tonie said. It's exciting. It's fun. Obviously, it's March, there's going to be people, big crowds everywhere, so, yeah, we have played in front of big crowds. Just excited.

**Q. You two are both seniors. Just talk about the road environment and being in the NCAA Tournament and playing as a senior.**

AMELIA HASSETT: I think, obviously, playing as a senior, you know it's going to be your last one, so just playing every game like it could be your last. We're hoping to make a big run, but it's just super fun just to be out there with the girls.

TONIE MORGAN: Yeah, what Milly said. You don't want it to be your last this early. You want to keep playing so you fight like hell every time and your teammates feel the same way.



**Q. Amelia, you guys have to face down low the duo of Meme Wheeler and Carter McCray. Do you feel the SEC has prepared you for that? You played South Carolina and a lot of those physical teams. Do you feel like you're ready to face that duo?**

AMELIA HASSETT: Yeah, I think the conference we play in definitely prepares us. They have a lot of great post players in the SEC, so I think just playing the schedule that we did definitely will help us prepare for tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Any other questions for our student-athletes? All right. Ladies, thank you very much. We'll let you go.

All right. Questions now for Coach Brooks.

**Q. Follow up what I asked the players in terms of West Virginia's defense, how unique is it? Is it identical to what some of those you faced in the SEC or do they all have little nuanced differences?**

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, you're going to play a 2-2-1 or a full-court man or a 1-2-2. That's what everybody runs, but it's just the attitude of it. Some people will do it occasionally. Some people will try to throw it on you. They're very consistent with what they're going to do throughout the whole the whole basketball game.

We've played teams that have pressed us the majority of the time. Tennessee comes to mind. Even we played in a road game earlier this year, it was a little bit of a different level, obviously, but Marshall. Marshall is consistent with their pressing throughout the whole basketball game.

So it's something that you just have to be ready for. Watched the game yesterday and Miami of Ohio had 15 turnovers but it felt like 35 turnovers. The turnovers were loud and they make you take some quick shots sometimes. We just have to be on guard the whole game and we can't let one turnover turn into two turnovers that turns into three turnovers that turns into a bad shot and then they can get on a run.

They do a very good job with it. They're very good at the pressing part of it. They're very good at understanding where they're going to be and they play off of each other. It will be one of the better presses that we've seen this year. But it's not identical to any press that we've seen, but it's bits and pieces of a lot of them that we've seen.

**Q. West Virginia's pressure, your height are the two obvious story lines. Is there another aspect to this game that you're seeing that might be critical in the**

**outcome?**

KENNY BROOKS: I think you hit on the two distinct strengths of each team. I'm sure they view their quickness to their advantage and we view our height to our advantage in a lot of different ways, whether it's been breaking a press or defending the lane.

Obviously we're playing on their home court and they're going to have a tremendous advantage in that manner. But it's going to be two really good teams with contrasting styles probably a little bit. Who is going to will their way to win is just a matter of playing in March and having the right attitude and being able to understand and deal with anything that happens.

**Q. Coach, just tell us what folks can expect from Clara. I don't want you to give away all the secrets, but she's just everywhere on the court. Just talk about her talents and what she's brought to you this year.**

KENNY BROOKS: She's unbelievable and Clara will do whatever Clara has to do to help us win a basketball game. When you have a superstar like Clara, a lot of times she wants the basketball all the time. She wants the basketball.

But you talk yesterday's game, for instance, it was evident that they were going to double-team her every time she touched it. She's fine with that as long as she can find her teammates and they can step up and score.

She's so much more to us than just scoring. She's our leader on the defensive end. She's one of the best defensive players I have ever coached in my life. Not only because she can block shots, but she really understands what's going on and it's not just her person, she really understands what's going on with other people. She helps out a lot. She quarterbacks our defense. She's a tremendous player.

I thought she played an exceptional game yesterday just because they were really trying to get the ball out of her hands and she didn't force anything. She just let the game come to her and it helped us get a really good win.

**Q. Just specifically the turnover battle in the road environment, how important will that be for you guys tomorrow?**

KENNY BROOKS: It will be important but I don't think you understand the importance of the turnovers on a stat sheet. We have to make sure that the turnovers don't lead to points. It's a live ball. As I mentioned before, you can't let one turnover turn into two that turns into a bad shot.

You also have to attack it and be smart about it. You don't want to just pull the ball back out all the time. But you don't always want to take a quick bad shot. There's a lot to it. That's why it's so disruptive. We got to make sure that we're confident with it and looking for advantages to take off of it and not just trying to retreat from it. Sometimes you have to attack a press to be successful. They do a tremendous job.

Mark does a hell of a job coaching. The fact that they're still running and pressing and it's March 22nd is really impressive. We're just looking forward to the opportunity.

**Q. Following up on Clara, she's at the top of a lot of team's scouting reports, obviously. I imagine that will be the case with West Virginia. Just as a coach, what do you have to do to put her in the best position possible to succeed?**

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, I think what we're seeing right now, you want to survive and advance. We had plenty of opportunities yesterday to do some other things but we really kept it vanilla in the second half and we knew we were going to play off of them double-teaming her and working on some other things. When you get a comfortable lead like that, that gives you that opportunity.

We have the ability, with her versatility, we move her around in so many different ways. We start her out on the perimeter. We can put her in some slot areas which makes it difficult to do a lot of things. Obviously we saved a lot of that stuff for this time of the year. Her versatility allows us to do that.

I still -- I work her out every day and I'll throw everything at her but the kitchen sink to see if she can do it and she can do it. She might not get it the first two, three, four reps but by that sixth one, she's mastered it and she has tremendous footwork. She has footwork of a guard. So she's learning to continue how to score in different ways.

I'm just excited for her future. She can go down as one of the best players that I've ever coached in my life just because of her versatility.

**Q. What makes Jordan Harrison and Sydney Shaw Gia Cooke, those three, what makes it so hard to kind of prepare for them and what do you see out of them and what do you expect?**

KENNY BROOKS: I don't know what adjective I can pick... they're just relentless. Their tenacity is unbelievable. They just keep going. I wonder sometimes do they have an extra battery pack in the back? Because they just keep

going. They play very well off of each other. Very well all of each other. They know how to funnel somebody to a certain area. They look to attack. They understand the system exceptionally well and then you get them on the offensive end and they know how to create opportunities for themselves.

I think I heard on a telecast -- I think I was watching, I don't know if it was a championship game in the Big 12 or one of those games in the Big 12 and I was listening and they said, Mark said, this is probably his best offensive team that he's had. Everything has been defense, defense, defense and those three allow them to, all of them, the post players as well, but they give them options so it's not just defense. They don't just have to score points off their defense. They can run their sets and those kids are crafty.

They play hard. They play as hard as anyone that we've seen all year. We know it's going to be no different tomorrow and obviously the crowd is going to be a part of it. We know that. I think the kids alluded to it. We played at LSU and it was, I don't know, 13,000 and we came away with a win. We played at Louisville and it was 10,000 or 11,000 and we came away a win. Our kids, that's what they were probably trying to talk about.

We have been in environments before. This environment is fun. Yesterday was electric. It was loud. But I think that we prepared for that and like I told the kids, what was it? 13,000 yesterday? Not one of them can come on the court. None of them can come on the court and we just have to pay attention to what's on the court.

**Q. Your memories of playing West Virginia as a player here and down there and then you've coached against them several times. You've had split results, some wins, some losses. Take me back to some of those. Give me your memories. Start with your playing days.**

KENNY BROOKS: Man, you went way back, huh? (Laughter) You want to know the biggest memory that I have about West Virginia? It does not matter how many times you experience it, it always catches you off guard, is that damn gun going off. I'm so glad this is a neutral, a "neutral" floor and they can't do those things. They can't sing the songs that they normally sing to get everything riled up in here.

It may very my freshman year and we came in here and we got warned. They were like hey, look, they're going to shoot that gun off, all right? Don't let it scare you. Don't let it scare you. That gun went off and we all ducked for cover and we were like what the heck is going on in here?

Then I came back here as a coach. I'm telling all my kids,



they're going to shoot that gun. Do not flinch. I'm talking, and all of a sudden, boom! And we were all flinching. That's probably the biggest.

But it is, it's a great atmosphere. I was on the other end of that, too, when we were at Virginia Tech. The big thing at Virginia Tech is they play "Enter Sandman." We hosted and they wouldn't let us play "Enter Sandman." We were a little disappointed. Our student section sang it a cappella so it was really good. I think that's what they did last night at the end of the game.

Tremendous fan support. It's always great to see womb come out and support the women's game. But I have had some history here and been here quite a bit and I have had mixed results so hopefully with this one, that will put us over the top.

**Q. We talked about the guards here. Shifting to the forwards, you have two forwards in Carter McCray and Meme Wheeler play consistent energy. What's the message to your forwards as you go into this game? Rebounding is going to be important. How do you attack that when you look at those two players in the starting five?**

KENNY BROOKS: It's like we talk about a lot. They are terrific players and they've added an element to this team that gives them some physicality. We watched them play quite a bit and they're physical post players with touch around the basket. We have to do our best to keep them away from it.

Our length, obviously, helps us a lot. It's how we've been able to guard post players throughout. But they're tremendous, relentless. They go off the ball, the glass. They're the first ones who know whether they think they made it or missed it and they do a really good job of getting second-chance opportunities.

They're physical. The ball is going to go up on the rim. I think we talked about it a little bit yesterday, we may look finesse but we're a tough basketball team, too. A lot of people talked about JMU's ability to rebound the basketball and we were like, hey, hello, wait a minute. A pretty good rebounding team, too, and we went out and proved that yesterday.

It's going to have to be the same thing. We're going to have to go, make sure we fight for every rebound, give ourselves a chance and not give them second-chance opportunities because it's not just guard-oriented. Their guards are terrific but their post players are fantastic as well and we understand that and we respect that.

**Q. Your length, you talked about the height. They can't hide from that. You talked about their press. That's going to be there as well. How much of basketball, never mind March basketball, is just going after the strengths and trying to see if you have a way through it, around it, over it?**

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, it's a mindset. Like I said 1090. You're going to have adversity all throughout the post-season. JMU had adversity yesterday when we jumped on them. We had a little bit of adversity in the second half when we couldn't hit a basket.

It's all in how you respond to it. If you allow, like I said, one or two turnovers to turn into three or four, then you can find yourself down. You have to rebound really correctly from any mistakes that you make. We're not going to go through the game with zero turnovers. We probably won't go through the game without zero blocks.

Both teams are going to have to really adjust to what's happening on the game. We know their strength. They know our strength, and we have to make sure we want to play our game as I'm sure they want to make sure that they are able play their game.

It's just going to be a will of ways. We've been playing our way for 30-something games. They've been playing their way for 30-something games. It's just going to be a matter of who does it better tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Any other questions for Coach Brooks? Coach, thank you very much.

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