

Virginia Tech Women's Basketball
Head Coach Kenny Brooks Q&A Highlights
Virginia Game Press Conference
Jan. 19, 2020

Opening statement:

"I told the team that I wasn't sure if I was more proud of them or happy for them. Obviously, we've had our ups and downs and had situations that didn't come out in our favor, but it never wavered today. We didn't play particularly well in the first half, credit top UVA they did a fantastic job really of jumping out, switching, crowding the lane – it was very hard for us to get anything going and we couldn't manufacture points. We came out in the second half, made a tremendous adjustment and it kind of took off from there and it propelled our offense from our defense. Very Happy for the kids, it's a great win for us, not only because of the history and rivalry but because of the placement it helps us in the ACC standings. This year is going to be kind of crazy. A complete effort, a team effort, the kids came out and everyone stepped up and contributed."

On the second half adjustments on the offensive end of the floor:

"We simplified, we simplified our offense with a bit of double post action. They did a fantastic job, they scouted us, they were really hedging on ball screens and making things hard for us. They were crowding the lane and we couldn't really get anything going. We were stagnant, we were forcing up some shots. We had a couple kids who weren't playing particularly well, but we were able to get some spacing in the second half with that double post offense and we could see the double teams coming a lot better and it opened up some things for us on the perimeter. It looked a lot smoother, then the kids just did a tremendous job of adjusting."

On five players on double figures and the balance on the squad

"Well we have kids who can step up and do a lot of different things. I thought in the Duke game especially down the stretch, Lydia [Rivers] was very tentative, she missed a layup or two and then she stopped shooting. Tonight, she didn't stop shooting, she was aggressive. We have confidence in each and every one of them, but we told Lydia 'Shoot the basketball. You're actually hurting our offense if you don't shoot it because we're expecting you to shoot it.' Tonight, she hit a couple big shots. She was scrappy down low, I'm most proud of Lydia on her defense on [Virginia guard Jocelyn] Willoughby. I'm not going to sit here and say that she stopped her but she really contested things and made it very tough especially in the second half but she did it on both ends. Taja [Cole] did a tremendous job, didn't play particularly well in the first half, but got us going in the second half with transition baskets we got a couple. That was very important. You look at somebody, I told Aisha Sheppard that was the best 3 for 15 shooting performance I've ever seen. It's just because her first half she was out of it. Her offense was just out of sorts so then it affected her on the defensive end. Then she came out in the second half, she had a different look on her face. She did hit a couple shots but she was more engaged in the game. Then Dara Mabrey she gave up a couple 3-point shots to [Virginia guard Amandine] Toi I think it was and we sat her a little bit, we talked about some things and

she came back and hit some big shots. I think that 30-footer was the one that allowed us to breathe a little bit and do some different things on the defensive end but everyone stepped up. Cayla King you know she didn't score tonight but she looked confident. Elizabeth Kitley, you know Liz is going to be a tremendous force for us in this league when it's all said and done, she's just learning how different people are playing her and where she needs to get her points. She did a really good job so team effort, a total team effort and I'm proud of them."

On what changed in the second half:

"I think a lot of that was we really simplified our offense and kids knew where shots were really going to come from because they weren't able to double us anymore and we were able to crash the boards. Trinity [Baptiste] did a really good job coming off the bench to rebound the basketball, Liz is learning how to rebound with her feet. That's an expression that we use because instead of watching for the ball, she will move her feet and now she's getting underneath the ball and she can jump up and go get it. Lydia is a force on the boards so just being a little bit more aggressive helped us get some second chance opportunities."

On what the Hokies did better to finish the game as opposed to in previous games:

"I thought we did a really good job of continuing to attack. We didn't sit around and say 'Ah okay we stopped them we have a 3-point lead so this possession is not important.' I thought we valued every possession down the stretch. There are still a couple of things we probably could've done better but a much better performance down the stretch today than it was against Duke. It's something that we talked about, something that we stressed and actually it's to a point where it's just Taja getting to a point where she's comfortable knowing what I want in certain situations. She was much better today and even Aisha Sheppard and Dara Mabrey were more in tune to what we really wanted."

On heading home for the next two games after being on the road:

"Even though we've had a couple of road games, we had a great following at NC State, our fan base, we had a great following at Duke, we had a great following here tonight and you're still away from the friendly confines of Cassell but we knew this was going to be a tough stretch. When I saw the schedule come out, Mary McElroy, the Senior Women's Basketball Commissioner, I looked at her and said 'You guys didn't do us any favors.' Four of our first six are on the road in the ACC and two of those happen to be top 10 teams and one of them is your rival. I knew it was going to be a tough stretch but I think we've gotten through it, we've weathered it, we would love to be 4-2 at this point but we feel like we are in a good place. We have four of the next five at home, we play well at home, we have a good following at home and it's time to step up and take advantage of it. It's not going to be easy. We play Boston College on Thursday, they beat Georgia Tech at Georgia Tech today, it's going to be tough. Clemson, we have them on Sunday and they beat Duke today so it's just a crazy league, every game is going to be kind of different. There are no givens, and you have to come out and be prepared to play. To take a mantra from our football program, just 'Go 1-0.'

On the team's focus during the game:

“The second half I thought they were tremendously focused. First half I thought that UVA took us out of sync and we lost our focus. That’s just going to happen with inexperience. I know its game 17 but just trying to gel and play together. [Virginia head coach Tina Thompson] may say the same thing I know that she has a new cast of characters. We’re all trying to figure this thing out and I’m very happy that our kids – when they focus and lock in I think they can be a very dangerous team because we have the weapons. We have the capability of shooting the 3, we have the ability to throw the ball inside, so what we are this year compared to last year is more balanced with our inside outside game. We do have a low post presence, we do have 3-point capable shooters so we just have to make sure we have good balance with those people.”

On having a post presence for the first time at Virginia Tech:

“I haven’t had that since I’ve been coaching. When you’re at James Madison you’re not afforded the luxury of having a low post presence. Now we had a couple kids who were really good, but none as talented as Liz and I’ll be very honest. What she is able to do, she shot a 3 tonight. It almost went. She can shoot the 3. We went out the other day and I said ‘Look, you’re going to shoot a 3 on Sunday and it’s probably going to be from right here, let’s go make five’ and she went five for five. We moved her around and said ‘make three from the top’ and she went three for four. When I recruited her, she could not get the ball to the basket from the 3-point line and that just goes to show you her growth. She constantly is like ‘hey can we get a workout in today’, ‘hey can we work out a little bit before practice.’ She honestly reminds me of a young Regan Magarity as far as her basketball IQ. She’s a smart kid, I don’t know if you guys know, she’s a baby genius. She’s got a 4.0, never gotten a B in her life, she’s going to be a doctor. She came into Tech with 39 credit hours already, so she does all that and she studies the scouting report like you wouldn’t believe. She’ll ask me questions and I got to make sure I’m on my toes so that I can give her the right answer. When you have someone like that, it’s a blessing – not only because she’s six-foot-five and talented and skilled but she’s a great kid, she works hard and she’s only going to continue to get better. When you have that, it puts pressure that you’re going to use that to the best of your ability. The beautiful thing is our kids realize that, they really try to get the ball to her, sometimes to the point where they force feed it. Once we get it all together, and she gets comfortable down low on the block, she is going to be a tremendous player.”