

Virginia Tech Women's Basketball
Head Coach Kenny Brooks
Boston College Press Conference
Jan. 23, 2020

Opening statement:

"A really good performance by our kids. I thought it might have been our best defensive performance of the year. Obviously, Boston College is a high-powered offense. They score at a high clip and average almost 76 points per game. I thought our kids did a really good job at forcing the action and pushing them into areas they weren't extremely comfortable in. To make Cameron Swartz go 1 for 15 and Emma Guy 2 for 9, I thought that was a good performance. I was very pleased with that. They stayed together and did a tremendous job. We weren't as clean as I would have liked on the offensive end. We wasted some offensive possessions trying to play a little bit fast. All in all, I thought we did a tremendous job on the defensive end. Offensively it wasn't pretty, but we still got 70 [points] and we learned that we don't have to rely on certain kids every night to do it. Aisha Sheppard, 6-18, not a stellar performance, but she still scored 19 points. Dara Mabrey didn't shoot the ball and they were taking away a lot of what she does for us. We had so many other people step up. Lydia Rivers, they tried to put a guard on her and she took advantage of that. Trinity Baptiste was tremendous down low with 20 points. My girl Liz Kitley, she hit her first three and I called it. I said earlier today, 'She's going to make one.' The kid can shoot and she's developed a three-point shot to the point where I'm very comfortable with it. I told the team after the game that Liz hit her first one tonight and she's still going to break the three-point freshman record this year. I'm very happy for her and all of them because they've been working extremely hard and coming together. I think that the way we play we have the chance to be very good."

On the performance of point guard Taja Cole:

"Taja and I had a long conversation tonight as the game was in its waning moments. I told her that was the last one that she could have like that. She was a little frustrated in the beginning because she didn't feel like she had the people running at the clip she wanted. Sometimes when you have a dynamic athlete like that, you know, LeBron James gets a little upset when people can't match his intensity or athleticism. I told her, 'No one is going to be able to run as fast as you do. They have to run and get in their positions, and you have to wait. Whatever the situation, you can't let it get your game down.' I didn't have that connection that I had with her on Sunday. We talked about it and I said, 'You are the leader of this team. You have to raise everyone up. You can't let those outside things affect the way you play.' She needs to be locked in. She has to be my mini-me. We've developed that. I think we see things eye-to-eye. I don't know how the conversation I had with her tonight, I don't know how it would have gone over with her in November or early December. Now the trust they have with each other and the coaches and what they can be, I think it's allowing us to grow and be that kind of team we want to be."

On whether this team has the ingredients to make an NCAA Tournament run:

“We have an NCAA caliber team. We can play with the best of them. We can do a lot of different things. But I thought we had an NCAA-caliber team last year, too. We didn’t have the chemistry last year. It took us a while, last year, in the ACC. We just didn’t have the chemistry in the beginning. Now, we’re further ahead as a basketball team and what we’re capable of doing. We have the tools. Obviously, kids have to stay healthy and continue to grow. If we continue to get better and better and work together, yes, we do. First, you have to take care of business. And tonight, we did so, 1-and-0 against a good Boston College team, who we just watched beat Georgia Tech. We have Clemson on Sunday, and I’ve seen them do damage to people. That’s what I like about this team—they don’t know the history. They don’t know the history of Virginia Tech, and I don’t think they care. They are just focusing on what we’re capable of doing with this group. They are really focused on themselves and this group and what they’re capable of doing.”

On each member of the team being accountable and picking each other up:

“It started off the court. We took a wonderful trip to Europe this summer. The only people who had played for me before were Aisha Sheppard, Trinity Baptiste, Dara Mabrey, and Kendyl [Brooks] who we thought we we’re going to get back at that moment. And, we incorporated these freshmen who are tremendous, wide-eyed, want to learn. They come from tremendous high school programs, AAU programs. We added Taja Cole and Lydia Rivers, who are all about winning. When we went overseas, usually by day six you cannot wait to get home. You can’t wait. Day twelve, [the players] were sad they were going home. Throughout that whole process, as a coach and a parent, you watch and see what’s developing. They were never with the same group. You watch them enjoy the whole process, they formed that bond, we got back and it just continued. Because my daughters are on the team, they are at my house all the time, and it’s not just the same ones. That is the element that we needed that could possibly put us over the top, but it’s also the element that makes it exciting for me. It makes it so much fun, to the point where they have to tap me on my shoulder during practice because practice might be two-and-half hours. I’ve never done that in January. But they have so much potential. And they want to learn so much, that a three-hour practice doesn’t seem like anything. You enjoy being around them, but more importantly, they enjoy being around each other.”

On what made the game plan so effective:

“I think [the players] listened. They’re still trying to grow. We have kids that have never played at this level. Our non-conference schedule was challenging, but when you get to this level, it is different. We call it ‘Big girl basketball.’ The ACC, kids are strong and powerful and fast. I think it’s taken us a couple games to get up to speed, but these young kids, they love scouting reports. They read the scouting report from front to back. They want to know about their

opponents. Tonight, it paid off. The intensity was there. The communication was there. Boston College is a high-powered offense. They get it up and down, their transition is as good as anybody's. Our kids were aware of where to push them, and the communication level was high."

On the play of forward Trinity Baptiste:

"She got into a rhythm. We got the ball to her in her sweet spots. We've had to change our offense a little bit from where it's been in the past to really just focus on getting the ball inside, and she's the beneficiary of that. She's had a couple good games. Even though she had six points against Virginia, she was down low a lot. She had 13 rebounds. Putting them in an area where they are more comfortable, I think it's beneficial for them but also for us as a team. It makes us stronger, more powerful, and we get more points in the paint."