

Virginia Tech Women's Basketball
Head Coach Kenny Brooks Q&A Highlights
UNC Game Press Conference
Jan. 5, 2020

Opening statement:

"It was a really good win and you can look at it a lot and I'm sure you have asked me – last year we started 0-7 what that meant and how did it affect us. I'm not going to sit here and lie, it is a thought you have when you start off 0-2. The ACC scheduling gods didn't help us out when they sent us to Florida State and then to NC State, two top 10 teams. You'll get worried how that's going to affect your kid's psyche especially the way we lost the game at NC State. We fought, we had a chance to win, we didn't come up with the win. They were dejected but they quickly turned it around. This was a tough game, we had stretches where we looked really really good and we had stretches where we just lost a little bit of focus so we have to continue to get better. I thought we got good production from a lot of different people at times and we need that to be more consistent throughout the basketball game in order for us to be one of the top tier teams in this league."

On the offense in the third quarter building a lead:

"I think it started with our defense. We made a couple of adjustments defensively, got them out of whack. We were able to get stops, get out and run and we were able to capitalize on it and build a lead. Give them credit, they made a couple of adjustments there and they cut the lead, and it wasn't by accident it was by design. They did a couple things to us and we had to play the pick and roll differently and then they came back down and they made us stagnant on our offensive end because they went zone. They were able to cut the lead but I thought we did a good job to weather the storm. Dara [Mabrey] hit a big 3, Taja [Cole] had a big play towards the end. We have a lot of growing up to do – and when I say growing up, growing together as a team. We're trying to find that leader organically, we're not trying to say 'Hey you're going to be the leader' and seeing who is going to step up and having different people do so. I thought Aisha Sheppard and Dara Mabrey were both flat in the beginning of the game, therefore they got into foul trouble, we had to play freshman a lot in the first half but we recovered and when we get everyone on the floor playing well together we're a pretty exciting team. It's just that we had that disconnect sometimes. Probably 90% of the teams in the country would say that but if we want to be who we want to be, we'll have to learn to focus throughout that."

On the Hokies responding after UNC cut their lead down to three points in the fourth quarter:

"Yeah, obviously as I mentioned we went to a play out of the timeout we wanted to get Taja in a penetrating role to kick it to Dara because I thought out previous possessions we were stagnant. It's almost like they caught us off guard and then we went to that and got more aggressive, we got Dara a wide-open look. She was able to give us a little bit of separation, a little breathing room but these are learning periods that we have to go through. They're not a fun thing to go through while you're doing it when you watch an 18-point lead get cut down to three, but we're going to go back and watch film tomorrow. The one thing about this group,

they're eager to learn. Sometimes I would like for it to be at more of an accelerated pace but they are learning from their mistakes. They watch, they are very attentive to what we're trying to do and there will be a lot of film that we are going to watch tomorrow."

On the luxury of having several players who can find their shot on the floor:

"You know what it's a blessing and a curse. It's a blessing because you can look to a lot of different areas to get production from. It's also a curse too because sometimes you don't know where you want to go when you need a bucket. Last year I knew exactly where we were going, I think I knew and all 2,000 people in the arena knew we were going to Taylor Emery coming off a ball screen somehow some way. This year, we're still trying to form that leader, Aisha Sheppard has shown she's one of the more prolific scorers in our league but she's still learning how to get to that shot. Dara Mabrey, if you leave her open she's one of the best shooters in the country but the game plan is don't leave her open. SO, we're still searching and trying to find it organically because we don't want to force feed it into a certain area because it won't happen naturally. Today, those two kids were on the bench and Trinity [Baptiste] stepped up in the first half. Trinity has been trying to find her way and bless her heart we've been trying to find her niche in our group as well because last year she was a low post presence because Regan Magarity was a perimeter post player. The low post was there. Now, Liz [Kitley] is here and Trinity doesn't have a whole lot of room to work and we're trying to figure out where to put her, but we need her production and I thought she was tremendous especially in the first half today."

On what enabled Baptiste to have an effective game vs. UNC:

"Well I think she just got loose a little bit. She got the ball in our comfort zone and she went to work a couple times and knocked down shots. Ironically, they were the same shots that she got against Florida State, she just didn't make them against Florida State. She stepped up and knocked them down today. When she gives us that production, that's another scoring threat that we need especially inside. Again, trying to put it all together, Trinity you look at her, Dara and Aisha Sheppard, the group they played with last year and then look at this group, now and it's a totally different group. For us to still be sitting here at 11-3 and have a chance to go on a pretty good run that's pretty remarkable especially with the turnover rate that's happening so much in college athletics."

On initial scouting of Pitt:

"You know what, I was able to watch Pitt because they just played North Carolina a couple days ago. Lance [White], they are a lot better than they were last year. They are very unorthodox, they really make you play ugly. They are going to run at you, they might have two people on the ball, they might not have anybody. I'm still learning that zone that he's running but we know that it's going to be a fight because they play hard, they play extremely hard and regardless of if they are playing well or not, they are going to keep coming after you so we're going to have to keep our focus and lock in. It's going to be a tough fight for us to win."

On whether Tech's defense did something to make it a tough shooting day for UNC:

“I thought we did. We mixed it up a little bit. When you look at it, they’re a high-powered scoring offense, they are. They get it up and down and they shoot a lot of 3’s and shoot them in transition. That was a point of emphasis to get back, contest those shots and I thought our post players did a decent job of getting back on the inside. Yeah, I knew we didn’t win the rebound battle. They have two kids in there that just pop them inside. The shot goes up and they do a good job of rebounding, but I thought we ran – we were very conscious of those kids and where they were going to be and contesting those shots. That’s something we do. We are a bend but don’t break defense. We’re not going to get out and cause you to turn the ball over 20 times. We’re not going to get out there and play passing lanes and push you all the way to half court because we’re so athletic, we’re going to guard the lane. We guard the lane and we bend, then when you shoot it, we’re going to do our best to try and rebound the basketball and get out and run.”

On Dara Mabrey and if she tweaked something in the NC State game:

“She did. That’s one of the things is Dara Mabrey, what she lacks in height or athleticism, she makes up for it in heart. She’s one of the toughest kids I’ve ever been around. I’m talking about mentally and physically. I’m able to coach her hard, she’s in the locker room right now and she’s worried about a couple plays, she didn’t execute right on the defensive end. I told her ‘What you did for us tonight, your presence being out there, what you did for us hitting big shots, knocking down your free throws at the end, you deserve to go home and don’t think about basketball at all, just relax.’ She got a big smile on her face but she did, she tweaked it. If it had been me, I probably wouldn’t have played today.”