

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Virginia vs Texas

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Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

Fiserv Forum

Virginia Tech Hokies

Keve Aluma

Hunter Cattoor

Storm Murphy

Justyn Mutts

Coach Mike Young

Media Conference

MODERATOR: We are joined now by Virginia Tech student-athletes Justyn Mutts, Keve Aluma, Hunter Cattoor, and Middleton, Wisconsin's Storm Murphy. The ACC tournament champs, Virginia Tech. Questions, please.

Q. Other than Storm, what kind of team mindset this year going to the NAAs with you guys being so hot and having been here last year versus what the mindset was, the attitude was going into the tournament last year?

HUNTER CATTOOR: I would just say it's kind of like a new season for us. We went to the ACC tournament, won that, cleaned the slate, and now we get ready for this tournament, take it one game at a time.

JUSTYN MUTTS: I feel they're one of the hottest teams in the country right now looking at the numbers since February. At this point, all we can do is take it one game at a time like we did in the ACC tournament, focus on tomorrow and what happens after that.

STORM MURPHY: I wasn't a part of this team last year, like you said, but I think the same as Justyn Hunter said. We went up to Brooklyn and took the ACC championship, but we really focused on one game at a time, didn't try to focus on the next day. It was one possession and one opponent at a time. I think we really just tried to stick together as much as possible, realized that we were going



to go through some adversity during games and teams were going to go on runs. But at the end of the day, we had to stick together and fight for each other. We know Texas is really good. And this is the greatest tournament on earth, so we're going to have to stay together every possession and each day.

KEVE ALUMA: I mean, just say one game at a time. I think that pretty much sums it up.

Q. This is for all you guys. I want to start with Justyn. You guys have talked so much about how dark of a hole you guys were in back in January. How much fun has this last month and a half been for you guys, especially after everything that transpired in Brooklyn? How much fun are you guys having and -- just happy to be here. Obviously, this is the end goal.

JUSTYN MUTTS: It's amazing. As you said, we kind of dug ourselves a hole. It's crazy to see the disrespect people were putting on us. Nobody believed in us anymore. And then for us to finally start winning games, going on a run. And then to see that we were kind of ranked a little bit low kind of showed that if we didn't win, would we still be here. So it's just a constant battle to prove who we are, what we're about. We're all up for the challenge. We've got nothing but fighters on our team. Being here isn't the goal, but proving who we are is.

MODERATOR: If we can go down the line.

STORM MURPHY: Yeah. Honestly, I would say being here means more than I can really even describe. Pretty emotional, to be honest. I read a couple articles, saw some tweets and stuff about people apologizing for the hate and the disrespect and everything they gave us throughout the season, losing hope and doubting us, talking about how this went from one of the most expected, greatest, you know, exciting teams to the biggest disappointment when we lost some games.

To see what this team did to just block out that noise, let that fuel us and believe even more how good we were and what we could do to then go win an ACC championship and earn every single right and reason to be here makes



me just, like, incredibly proud of these guys, of this team.

I think I would say it's an absolutely defining moment of my life just to reflect on what we went through as humans, what we battled every day. Some days, it was hard to show up, some days it was hard to want to come back and practice, and we wanted to get as far away from basketball as we could. That was the temptation. But at the end of the day, our coaches and our players just continued to put in the right stuff and make the game fun. That's why we started playing it. With that, we were able to do this, and I'm really, really proud of our guys.

HUNTER CATTOOR: I would say it's all about the journey. Through the highs and lows, it's all worth it. Going into battle with these guys and these coaches every day just makes it all worth it at the end of the day. When the confetti was coming down, all the hard work we went through, all the hard times, it makes it all worth it. Going through that, being here, and having the opportunity to play another game, we're all grateful.

KEVE ALUMA: We're definitely grateful. I think it was an emotional run. I think trying to stay grounded and get ready for this next game is where we're at.

Q. Storm, this is for you. What has this week been like for you as far as friends and family kind of reaching out, maybe, for tickets and stuff like that? And then what does it mean to be able to play less than 100 miles away from where you grew up?

STORM MURPHY: Yeah, it means a lot. It's fun. Even in Brooklyn, I was getting a bunch of texts saying, Y'all have to win this. Y'all have to win this. There's no other option. I've gotta come to the tournament game, without any plans that it would be right in our backyard. So it does -- it means a lot to be able to come back home. I've been to Milwaukee countless times, played so many games in Milwaukee, and have a lot of friends from here and Madison and all over the state. A lot of people are hitting me up, friends and family. It's been a busy week trying to get all the tickets sorted out and figure it out. But, yeah, I'm just excited to have that sense and feeling of being home.

Q. I'm sure that you guys have addressed this quite a bit with the media and those who cover you on a regular basis, but I'm just curious, if each of you could comment on this: From 10-10 to where you are now, is there one thing that stands out more than the other things about why it all turned? I know it takes a variety of things, but is there any one thing that's in your mind that stood out more than anything else as to why you go from 10-10 to being here in the tournament?

JUSTYN MUTTS: I wouldn't say we were selfish at the beginning of the year, but I think, as we got into that hole, it became even less about me and more about doing whatever it took to help my teammates, help my brothers. You know, once everybody just gave of themselves and we really became one group, one unified group, I feel we really started making steps in the right direction.

STORM MURPHY: I would say just kind of a will to win. Everyone just really felt a sense of urgency and desperation once we were 10-10 and weren't where we wanted to be. I would say that is kind of what really helped us and pushed us to do what Justyn just mentioned, to come together and make it only about winning. We didn't want to see ourselves lose another game.

HUNTER CATTOOR: Analytically, I would probably say defense. I think Coach Young showed us, middle of the year, that we were 15th in the ACC in defense, so I think we took that as an emphasis in practice each day and we got a lot better. I don't know where we're at now at the end of ACC play, but I think our defense stepped up and just being connected on that defensive end.

KEVE ALUMA: I think physicality, which had to do with defense and rebounding and everything, just being more physical and being more locked in.

Q. In 2019, you were a part of a, quote, normal, unquote, NCAA Tournament, open practice the day before, podium and such. And then last year at Indianapolis, obviously not in that. Can you compare and contrast the two experiences, and how much better is something like this as opposed to what last year was?

KEVE ALUMA: Definitely. This is a cool experience. Obviously, at Wofford, I wasn't the one coming to the podium and being asked questions, but it's a cool experience. Glad that we'll be able to have fans in there and just see what happens.

Q. Hunter and Storm, I'm just curious: Is there such a thing as a bad 3-pointer? Who gets on you if you're not taking these shots? And when those shots aren't falling, what do y'all know to do?

HUNTER CATTOOR: I'd say very rarely does Coach Young get mad at us for taking a bad shot. If it's awful, he'll let us know. But other than that, he kind of gives you the green light to go out there and let it fly. That speaks to the trust he puts in us. But when it's not working -- I was going through a shooting slump the last month and a half, and Storm was, every game, every practice, by my side telling me to keep shooting, I'm the best shooter in the gym, stuff

like that. So having my teammates have my back and having the confidence to keep shooting even when it's not going in.

STORM MURPHY: Yeah. I would say kind of the same thing. Coach Young does not ever really get on us. And there's actually been a couple instances before games, pregame speeches or at up times at halftime, say, we're not shooting well in the first half. He'll come in at halftime, he will -- and he will tell us, Y'all are such good shooters. Y'all have worked for this. Every single day, I see you make countless shots. Let's step up and shoot it. If you actually turn down an open shot, you're coming out of the game. I know that has meant a lot to us shooters and everyone on our team, kind of gets our confidence going. Then just like Hunter said, I was in a couple slumps throughout the season as well and just had guys on the team, Hunter and our coaches and everyone, telling me just to keep shooting, I'm a great shooter, and I have every right and reason to be confident everything's going in.

Q. Just wondering. Last year, Oregon State won the Pac-12 Tournament, kind of played their way in the field like y'all did now. They ended up getting all the way to the regional final. Wondering if any of y'all remember that from last year, if it's come up this week, maybe going on a similar run?

HUNTER CATTOOR: I would say we're just worried about Virginia Tech. They had a good run last year. But now we're worried about ourselves and creating our own story this year.

STORM MURPHY: I would say, to add on to that, there's something about the momentum that we do have right now. Like Justyn said, we're one of the hottest teams in the country, and we do want to continue to play that way. But like Hunter said, it's focusing on us. It's focusing on one opponent at a time, one day at a time. And hopefully, that will lead to a month of basketball.

Q. This is for Justyn and Hunter, Keve. Last year's -- last year in the tournament, it was such a rollercoaster game, and you had the high of sending it into overtime the way it did and then losing it. If memory serves me correct, it was the first game of the tournament, so it was kind of over before the party started, so to speak. What have you guys taken from that experience, just, I guess, all of it or if there's anything in particular?

JUSTYN MUTTS: For me, I think Hunter as well -- but it was my first time actually being here, so I was just so caught up in the fact that this is March Madness. I'm just so grateful to even be here. It was almost like the game was a second thought by the time it came time for that.

Now being through that, having had the experience, understanding the whole City of Blacksburg is believing in us, it's a whole different approach. These are must-win games. If we lose, our season's over. For guys that had no eligibility -- like Storm had no eligibility left -- this is it. I don't know. One-game-at-a-time type of mentality.

HUNTER CATTOOR: Like Justyn said, it was our first experience. You're kind of looking around in awe. You see the March Madness on the court. You seen it as a kid on TV. So you're bringing it all in. But being here a second time, it's like, all right, I've been here, no more worries about this, like it's time for business. Not like last year wasn't business. Just that approach going into it. Also knowing that media time-outs are a lot longer in the tournament than regular games.

Q. This is for everyone. Texas is one of the best defensive teams in the country. What makes them so tough, just what your preparation is? What makes them so tough to match up against offensively?

MODERATOR: If we can start way down at the end. Just one at a time, please.

KEVE ALUMA: Well, one thing we've kind of talked about is just how physical they are. We know the game's going to be a dog fight. And those are the two things I've kind of seen.

HUNTER CATTOOR: They just don't make anything easy. When you have the ball, they're pressuring you, fouling you in passing lanes. Like Keve said, physicality. So on defensive, they don't make anything easy for you. They're going to blow up a bunch of stuff not let you get into your set, so we're going to have to be strong with the ball and be able to run our stuff.

STORM MURPHY: I would say exactly what they said. And I think they got really smart players, guys who are older and experienced. I know they have a bunch of transfers as well, so they know the right spots to be in and just kind of the game of basketball in general. They're savvy. They're smart. They can blow things up, like he said. And I know they rebound pretty physically, and they're aggressive.

JUSTYN MUTTS: Pac-12's a really good conference. We've got to be ready to step up and not only meet but exceed the physicality of the game and be ready to play.

Q. Storm, I want to know a little about your transfer process. It seems like it would have been a no-brainer, but I don't know that for sure.

And I wonder, Keve, have you played a role in that? Or once you found out that he was coming, kind of what were you telling your teammates about him? Storm, did you maybe even think about doing this sooner and taking that extra year back in 2019 when your coach left in the first place?

STORM MURPHY: When Coach Young in 2019 left, didn't necessarily think about it. That wasn't necessarily an option at the time with the team VT had. I was very set on staying and finishing my two years with our associate head coach who got the job then, Coach McCauley, who's great.

Then the transfer process. Talked to a few schools, and Wisconsin was definitely an option that -- you know, I thought either maybe go home, play close to family and where I grew up, or VT is everyone and everything I know, the system and the coaches and players, stuff like that. So that's kind of why it was a no-brainer to go to VT. And Keve definitely played a role. I remember FaceTiming him. I think they were at the ACC Tournament that week when I entered the portal and just talked about what it would be like and everything. So he definitely played a role, and he's a big reason why I transferred.

MODERATOR: We have one virtual question for the student-athletes. We'll keep working out the kinks, let you guys know. Then we'll bring up Virginia Tech head coach Mike Young. Coach Young, please.

Q. Mike, your rebounding since mid-January, you guys weren't rebounding so well. I looked at the average rebounding margin. It went from about .25 to about three and a half, just the average rebounding margin per game. What has helped you? I know you talk about the guards rebounding, but what have you liked about the way you guys have attacked the glass better, and how has that propelled you as of late?

COACH MIKE YOUNG: David, our guards rebounding, there were 27 rebounds for us against Duke, right? 27 rebounds against Duke, and 20 of them came from our guards. There was something else in the last two games. There were 40-something, and a number of those were from our guards.

Now, that will be tested tomorrow. All right? The Longhorns will wear us out if we are sharp with our cutouts and pursuing the ball better, rebounding from our guards. I know that Mutts and Aluma will rebound. They've got a full plate tomorrow with No. 32. I'm sorry. Names escape me. But Timmy Allen is a terrific rebounder, as is No. 30. Jones, No. 1, will stick his nose in there. So it will be a huge part of the game tomorrow afternoon.

Q. Mike, Justyn was saying both Monday and again today that last season in Indianapolis, it was almost "we're happy to be here" type of thing. And he senses a different approach, a more business-like approach. We're here to win and advance. Do you sense something different in your club this year?

COACH MIKE YOUNG: I do. I do, David. I do. That experience was so different because of COVID and having to be up there in quarantine. This is the experience that we all came to expect for our players.

This is an older group. That was Mutts' first opportunity. There were a number of people on last year's team. Bede had done it. A couple others had done it. But for a couple of those guys, the first time -- this is a different game. You know, for the NCAA Tournament and all the exposure and the number of eyes that are on each of these games that are played, the magnitude of it. But I'll start -- as you know, I've done it for 35 games. I don't think I'm going to alter tomorrow. I'll start three five-year seniors and two juniors that have played a great deal of basketball. I think last week's experience in Brooklyn and what we did there, you know, further excites them to come here and play well against a really good Texas team.

Q. Coach, Storm's dancing seems like it's gotten better as you all continue to win. How have you seen his energy kind of impact the other players on the court when you guys are doing so well?

COACH MIKE YOUNG: I thought it was an interesting comment from the best in Coach K. I do think that his energy has had a great impact on our team. You know what you're going to get. He was terrific in those games up there. I think he had five 3s against Clemson. He was awfully good against Notre Dame and exceptional against Duke in the final with his ball handling and his passing, yes. And I think Pedulla's had a good part of this as well, I think they compliment one another. Pedulla does some things a little bit better than Storm as a young person. Storm's experience. He's done this thing before. We did it together in '19. But, yeah, Storm Murphy's energy and the effort that he puts into it in terms of the film study, in terms of the right stuff is infectious. It was recognized by the rest of the unit.

Q. You just touched on it, your veteran guys. We talked with Chris all season long about how old they are, and I'm curious. You can coach 22- and 23-year-olds differently than 18 and 19s, I would guess; right? Can you talk to them differently and be harder or whatever, and is that what maybe helped you guys through some of the rough patches this year?

COACH MIKE YOUNG: Chris has got an old bunch. You can talk to them differently, but you've got to be careful, too, as they are old, and they think they've got some answers. This has been a delightful group for me to coach, but they've heard it all. That's a part of it, too. Maybe this is different being Chris' first year and bringing this team together, but I've coached Aluma for five years. I've coached Storm Murphy, Hunter Cattoor for three.

I don't want to overstate it. It's more like a professional relationship now: What do you think of this? I pose it to them as a question. I'll do that a number of times tomorrow. What do you think? Next time down defensively, should we double Allen? Should we not? What do you want to run up here this time? I think that give-and-take, it just -- relationships evolve. And my relationship with this team and the older people on this team has evolved.

Q. From watching Texas film this week, what jumps out at you to explain why they're so good on defense, and what are the keys for you offensively to be able to put up enough points against them?

COACH MIKE YOUNG: I think typical of Coach Beard's teams, they're just so aggressive. Good Lord, you know exactly what they're trying to do. He's done it for years now from his time at -- was it Arkansas State? -- and then at Texas Tech. You know exactly what he's trying to do. Now, getting it there and getting that thing somewhere else without the ball being deflected is difficult. We cannot turn the ball over 15 times. If we do, we've got a problem. We've got to have sureness with the ball. We've got to catch well. We've got to pass well. We've got to put the ball in the post to Aluma and Mutts and see how the Longhorns are going to guard that, and then we've got to rebound. There's going to be some balls come off that rim tomorrow, and the Hokies have to corral them. Their work on the lane, on the free throw box-out, I marvel at it. You can tell it's like a badge of honor because their bench goes nuts when somebody comes out of there with a rebound. So rebound the ball, take care of the ball, and we'll take our chances.

Q. I'm wondering if you recall the first time you saw Storm Murphy and how it was that you found a small guard out of Middleton, Wisconsin, and brought him to your program. And then I'm interested about the, sort of, second recruiting process -- he mentioned Wisconsin was in the mix -- and if that was a hard sell to have him come to Virginia.

COACH MIKE YOUNG: I could talk to you for 30 minutes. I'll make it as quick as possible. I was somewhere, had an assistant call and say, Hey, listen. We need you to fly down to Augusta and see this guard. Well, we didn't have

the money to do that. I was at Wofford. I didn't have the money for a bologna sandwich and a bottle of Coca-Cola. I can't change a flight for \$300. I can't do it. But they insisted, and I did it. And I'm sitting with John Beilein. He was watching another kid. And they say the kid is -- he's probably five-ten, five-eleven, 170 pounds, but, boy, you're going to really love him. I was like, Jeez. So I did. I went down and saw him three times that day, and I did really enjoy his game, a little tiny guy, but, man, a basketball player and unselfish and played for Mac Irvin Fire in Augusta.

I go home. I call. I tell him, I really like how you play, and I'll offer you a scholarship to Wofford, and went back to wherever I was. We can't host kids on campus during July, so he calls and says, Hey, listen, Coach. We lost today. My dad and I want to come up and visit. I said, You're more than welcome to. I just can't be there. So he came up, visited, a self-guided tour, called on his way back, and said, Hey, if that scholarship's still there, I want to take it. I said, You're in. I'll take you. That's the easiest recruitment I had.

The second time was more difficult. That was a sacrifice, really close-knit family. That was a sacrifice for him and for his mom and dad to let him go that far away from home. I'm glad they did. I knew that Coach Gard and others in this region -- I don't know how intense that recruitment was. I never asked. But I knew that there would be some competition -- a lot of competition. And because of my relationship -- and our relationship was not going to trump maybe some personal family things. But we lost to North Carolina in last year's ACC Tournament. Got in my car on the way home, and the phone rang, and it was Stomer, and he said, I want to come. I said, Well, what took you so long? Thank God it worked out. He's been great. He's a wonderful, wonderful young person and nice to see him have another great year for us here.

Q. Just last year, Oregon State played their way into the field, got all the way to a regional final. Kind of the same thing, y'all had to play your way in as well. Is there something to, from your perspective, momentum going from one tournament to another? I know you've had experience in a one-bid league where you kind of needed to. Is there a whole blank slate once you get to this point, or does that momentum carry over, do you think?

COACH MIKE YOUNG: We're about to find out. That team, Coach Tinkle, I watched them a lot, watched them a lot this summer and the zone that they employed. They got on a roll, and there's no coming off. They were awesome. I think they went all the way to the Elite 8. I'm not sure of that.

A week ago -- just a week ago, 10 days ago, we were at Clemson and didn't play very well. Clemson played very well and beat us. And we got to play Clemson again in the first round of the ACC Tournament, and it takes an absolute bomb from Darius Maddox at the buzzer in overtime to win the game. And from that point forward, we were really good against Notre Dame. We were very good against North Carolina. I hope that this continues in here. It's a different environment, a different team. We haven't played Texas. But to your point, I hope that's how it transpires for us, as it did the Beavers a year ago.

Q. Do you have a definition of a bad shot?

COACH MIKE YOUNG: No. I do, Billy, I do. I was just talking to Will Purdue out in the hall. We talk a lot about it in July and September, about ball reversal and putting it in the post before a shot's taken. I haven't said a thing about a shot in a long, long time. I just don't want them going into the air thinking, Does that son-of-a-gun think this is a good shot or a bad shot? I want you to be free. We were free last week in Brooklyn, and I've got a number of them that can shoot it along with two post players in Aluma and Mutts that you feel that leather, let it rip. Misses are on me, and I'll take my chances. I've got a really good shooting team. We've shot it very, very well here over the last little bit.

MODERATOR: Coach Young, you're free.

COACH MIKE YOUNG: Thanks, everyone. Have a nice day.