

# NCAA Women's Basketball Championship: First Round - FGCU vs Virginia Tech

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College Park, Maryland, USA

**Virginia Tech Hokies**

**Coach Kenny Brooks**

**Elizabeth Kitley**

**Aisha Sheppard**

Media Conference



this so it's not like we are going to be afraid of the bright lights like we -- you know, the jitters and stuff that we were the first time around. And we're also better. Like we've gotten a lot better, and I think we're prepared to be in this thing for a long time. Like we're not just hoping to win, we're expecting to win so I think that's the biggest difference.

Q: Elizabeth, can you describe the last couple of weeks health wise and psychologically how it was trying to get ready for this game?

ELIZABETH KITLEY: Yeah, I think, you know, it's happening probably much earlier like in the ACC tournament is, you know, pretty unfortunate time. But the fortunate thing about it was I had like two weeks to kind of get better before the start of this tournament. So it has been a lot of, you know, exercises and rehab and stuff which has really helped me gain my, you know, confidence back and trust in my shoulder. So I think the timing just really helps and I'm like good to go, I'm ready for the tournament.

Q: What is it kind of like being back at home? I know you are from Alexandria, but how does it feel to kind of be back in the DMV? And do you expect to have some of your folks in the audience tomorrow?

AISHA SHEPPARD: Feels good to be home especially because a lot of people reached out to me and was telling me that they would be at the game and they would be in attendance. A lot of people already bought tickets so it's awesome the support that I get when I come back close to home so it's been great.

Q: Aisha, the second year for teams to be in the tournament is typically a good turning point. You had that first year, you get kind of those jitters out of your system. How much talk is centered around trying to seize the moment and seize the opportunity this time around?

AISHA SHEPPARD: A lot of it. It's funny that you mentioned that, that we're kind of like veterans now within

Q: For both of you guys, it was about a month ago, Coach Brooks said that Virginia Tech doesn't recruit McDonald's All-Americans, they recruit Five Guys All-Americans because they've got to make them in front of you and they make the All-Americans. Liz, I know, you kind of proved that true this week. And Aisha, you know, seems like you've broken every record in the book this year. For both of you guys, what was your vision when you committed to Virginia Tech, and do you feel like part of that has come true this season?

AISHA SHEPPARD: For me, I'm sure you all have heard the stories, you know, since I've been here for so long. But Coach and I discussed these things when he was recruiting me. And we talked about a lot of this, but, you know, the player that I have sitting next to me, she's done phenomenal things in a short amount of time. And that's just what -- those are the things that touches me more than anything because we couldn't get players like her when I was first starting out. And now, you know, she saw the product that we were producing and she wanted to be a part of it. And now it is just a testament to her hard work and what the program has been able to do. I'm just very excited for the trajectory that the program is on.

ELIZABETH KITLEY: To go back and give Shepp some credit, the reason I did like come here was because I saw the program take an upward swing. And I think my first or her first two years I was getting recruited here and I saw like what was building and how she was getting better as a player. And I could just see that Coach Brooks really wanted to make his players that he had better and not just like recruit over people all the time, which is like what some big schools just do, you know, what they attract, but he really wanted to build a team and I wanted to be part of that.

Q: I was wondering, you know, FSCU plays a really five out system. I was wondering if you guys have experienced a team that plays like them this year and what are challenges specifically with their offensive system?

ELIZABETH KITLEY: I think we've played teams that have, you know, five people that can shoot but not exactly like I feel like they play like five guards which is something I don't think the ACC really has. Maybe in the nonconference we saw something like it, but not as much as them. So it's going to be different, but good thing we've had a lot of time to prepare and we'll be ready.

Q: I know you guys don't care what the media says probably, but ESPN's put you on upset alert, and the Associated Press has put you on upset alert. Florida Gulf Coast has made 44 more three-pointers than any other team in the country. Do you guys almost feel like this is an 8/9 matchup or something like that? Does it feel more even than a 5/12 should?

AISHA SHEPPARD: To be honest with you, we know that Florida Gulf Coast deserved better than a 12 seed, but we also believe that we deserved better than a five seed. So in that aspect, I think both teams are prepared to play their hearts out. But, you know, we never care about what the media says. Nothing against you all, but we just -- we just play our game. We don't really care about that stuff.

Q: Defensively, what is important? How do you stop a team that loves to take that many threes? Sort of what is the key to slowing that down?

ELIZABETH KITLEY: I think we need to like look at each player individually because, yeah, they all can shoot but obviously some shoot at a higher percentage than others. So like just deciding basically who we are going to really, really sell out on and then who we'll like a lot to be a little bit more help because they don't just shoot threes. They get to the lane a lot, too, so we can't just commit.

Q: I know there is a lot of seriousness in March Madness, and this is for both of you or whoever wants to answer. Talk a little bit about the excitement of dancing. I mean how exciting is it just to be here, to walk through these doors and hit that court? I mean how exciting has it been on this ride so far?

ELIZABETH KITLEY: It's really exciting. Especially this year because last year was COVID, NCAA tournament was completely different. This is like the first normal one that we're experiencing. So it's our second trip but it's kind of the first traditional one. So kind of using that to feel the excitement even more because, you know, the more adrenaline we have hopefully the better -- you know, the

more fun we'll have when we're playing.

AISHA SHEPPARD: For me, it seems like it took a long time for us to get here being that the ACC tournament was so early. And then waiting for selection Monday and then finally being here. It has been amazing, but I'm just loving every minute of it because obviously this is my last one so I'm enjoying it. So it's fun to finally be here, and we can't wait to play tomorrow.

KENNY BROOKS: We're glad to be back. Glad to be back obviously under different circumstances where people are around, so. Last year I thought it was a tremendous experience for us making the tournament for the first time since 2006. To actually get our feet wet, to go experience it. But this year, you know, it's a little bit different. We have different expectations heading to the tournament, but also being able to play in front of people. We are very, very excited about that. It has been a tremendous year for us. Tremendous growth for our program. Many, many accolades individually and team wise. And I think we took the necessary steps to put ourselves in this position. So we're extremely excited. Glad to be here. Glad to be here with an experienced group. Combined with a couple of kids who transferred in to experience this. And so mission accomplished in that, but we're not done yet and we feel like that we have a great opportunity to play some good basketball against some very good opponents and good teams here and we're looking forward to the challenges.

Q: Kenny, can you talk about just the volume of three-pointers that they take and make and sort of the challenge that presents and how you plan to counter that?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, I get high anxiety when we play against teams who shoot a lot of threes so obviously it has been a stressful week knowing that you're playing against a team that shoots the absolute most in the country. But I think one thing you can't do is you can't lose sight of the fact that I think that they're one of the top teams in the country two-point field goal percentages as well. You know, so many people get so engulfed in their three-point opportunities, which you should, that sometimes you overlook their ability to get to the basket and shoot the two. Karl does a tremendous job with that team. They're extremely well coached. I think he's an analytical kind of guy using the formula that a lot of NBA teams use. You know, it's either a three-pointer or a lay-up. So we understand that you can't -- you have to be prepared and ready and understanding. And I have had to have some counseling sessions where I can't get upset when they hit a three because that's what they do. All right. That's what they do. But you can't lose sight of the fact, too, that they're really good at getting to the basket and shooting lay-ups. It has been a long week. Obviously when you're

conditioned to play against ACC teams and then all of a sudden you have three days to prepare for probably one of the most unique styles in college basketball, it's going to be a little bit different. But we have to keep telling our kids, you know, you can't get demoralized when they hit a three because that is what they do. When you look at the volume that they shoot, yes, it worries you, but they also they prove to be human because I think they shoot 33% from the three. I think we shoot 36% from the three.

So there's a lot that goes into it, but you can't fall to the fact that, okay, they are just a three-point shooting team.

Q: Kenny, it was about a month ago that you said you guys don't recruit McDonald's All-Americans, you recruit Five Guys All-Americans because you got to make 'em in front of you, however you worded it. Obviously that proved to come to fruition this week with Liz making the All-American team. If you could just speak to how that recruiting philosophy has kind of led to what this team has accomplished this season.

KENNY BROOKS: Yea, if I'm not mistaken, she made another one today, didn't she? U.S. Basketball. Tremendous story in itself. She came here, and she was highly recruited. Well coveted. Any time you are 6'5", 6'6", you're going to get attention. But I don't think anybody thought that she would be what she is. And that's a testament to her hard work.

You know, I told her if you meet me halfway, we'll put every ounce of effort into you to make you great. And She did more than that. You know, the kid is a competitor. And those are the type of kids we need to go out and get, competitors. Aisha Sheppards. You know, kids who will come in and they will work extremely hard, okay. Because yeah, we don't have the ready made patty that we can just put on the grill. We have to make it. We have to make it. But you have to have kids who want to be made into something like that. So that's been our philosophy. Go out and get kids who are not a finished product and they are going to work. And you get those kind of kids and they exceed your expectations, then you have a chance to compete against anyone. It has been a formula that we went to and it's worked extremely well and it is one that we will continue to go to. But you have to have kids who are willing to do so. And Liz is proof. Aisha Sheppard is proof. Georgia Amoore is proof. And those kids have gotten, you know, a lot better every year that they have been here.

**Q. : Coach, you spoke to it just a second ago, and Aisha also mentioned how this year is really a big moment of kind of getting here and staying here. You know, last year you made an appearance. But how important is it to make sure that you have a long stay**

## **here and not just a brief stay?**

KENNY BROOKS: Well, I mean I think you have to respect your opponent, first and foremost. I would love to go behind the scenes to try to figure out how they came up with the fact that Florida Gulf Coast is a 12 seed. They're not. You know, I don't understand how you can be ranked in both polls. As a matter of fact, they're ranked ahead of us in one poll and they're a 12 seed. And so the first and foremost, you have to respect your opponent. We understand who they are. We understand how well coached they are and how good they are. For me personally, this is like deja vu on the other side for me. I think in 2014 when I was at James Madison we were an 11 seed and we got hooked up against Gonzaga who was a 6 seed. And we felt slighted so we went in with a chip on our shoulder. So fast forward a few years, you know, we understand who our opponent is. They are very good. But at the same time, we put in a lot of work and our kids have developed to the point where we are good, too, okay. We are good, too. And so we feel like that if we go out, Florida Gulf Coast is a tremendous basketball team. We know that and respect that, but we also can't lose sight of the fact that we're a good basketball team, too. And we deserve to be here and deserve the ranking that we got, the seeding that we got. And we just need to go out and play to our capabilities. We get to the point where this week has been a lot about what Florida Gulf Coast does because they are very unique in their system, but we also focus on the fact of who we are. And we are a very good basketball team, and I'm sure Karl is over there wondering how he is going to defend us, too. They make -- they make 11 -- I think it's 11 and a half three's a game. We make almost nine. So it is not like we make two or three. So we can shoot the basketball well, too. And so, I don't know, I know they gave up three 3's a game, almost four 3's a game. I don't know if they played anybody who shoots it as well as we do. So I know we present challenges for them, too. So I think we present challenges a lot of ways because we make nine 3's a game and we also have a 6'6" all American inside. So we don't have to shoot 35 a game.

You know, our kids don't even want to shoot 35 a game because they know that Liz is a big part of what we do. So we're just going to focus on us. I think if we do that we put ourselves in a position to challenge and to advance. I think that is what Aisha was talking about. Last year we had to go through it and we ran through the buzzsaw which became Baylor. And we learned a lot from that experience, and I think it really helped us prepare through the summer and the fall and in the season knowing what you have to do to be able to advance in this tournament.

**Q. : Coach Brooks, how are you doing?**



KENNY BROOKS: Good.

Q: If you don't mind, just talk a little about Aisha Sheppard. This is sort of a homecoming for her considering she's from the DMV area. I mean how do you -- have you talked to her about that or has she expressed anything about that given the fact that she's going to have family in the stands and that means more fans for you guys as well?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, I mean the fan part is going to be really good. Just having support. Her family is going to be here. A lot of friends are going to be here. I don't worry about that. Sometimes you worry about that with players coming back home and do they play differently, what is the case? We've been fortunate where we've gotten her back in this area a few times. And there is nothing different about her. As a matter of fact, we took a trip this year the beginning of the season, I think it was our second and third game of the year and we played against GW and against George Mason. And she had phenomenal games in front of, you know, a lot of people. A lot of Sheppards were in the building, and she played extremely well. So I don't think it's going to be anything that makes her play any differently. And that's something that is a blessing for us. But the more support we can get in this building, the better off we'll be.

**Q. : I have two questions. So you mentioned, you know, kind of the differences between your teams. I was wondering if you are expecting FGCU to push the pace and maybe press a little bit. My second question is does anyone in the ACC play like them or is there anyone in the country that you've faced that plays like them?**

KENNY BROOKS: No. I'll answer your second question first. No. Very unique. Very unique. I mean I'm sure some people tried to emulate the style. He's been doing it forever. He and I, we respect each other and we talk a lot and we share a lot of same experiences when I was at James Madison. He is at Florida Gulf Coast for a long time. Being a mid major and what some people may consider a mid major power. You know, I know it is hard to get teams who want to play you. And his style is even more so. I referred to it as almost like a unicorn. You know it is out there but you just don't see it. You know, and when you run up against it, you are trying to figure out how you are going to stop it, it's like nothing else that you have ever seen. And we're built, we're built differently. We're built to go up against the rigors of an ACC schedule, a 21-game ACC schedule where there is a lot of pounding. More what some people might consider traditional basketball. What they do is very untraditional. They are smaller, but they are feisty. And, you know, we understand they are probably going to put one in front of Liz, and one

behind Liz. But what we're -- what I think is going to be a little bit different is that we still have shooters all around. We have three kids on the perimeter that shoot 40% from the three. That is a little bit different combination. I have not seen anything like it. I know a lot of people that I've talked to, they don't favor playing against that type style just because it's just so different and they take advantage of their advantages. You know, with the three-point shot, the smaller players. And they do a really good job of that. So we have to make sure that we handle that. And then I got so long winded I forgot your first question. Oh, yeah, he is not going to change. He is not going to change. When you have Morehouse, I don't think there is anybody in the country faster. She pushes it from one end to the other very, very quickly. And a lot of what they do is they push it and I'm not saying it's -- they push it so that you will suck in and then kick it back out. And so we have to be ready for it. We have one of the quickest guards in the country, too, two of them. Georgia Amoore and Kayana Traylor. We think that we do a good job and we can match up on them. Not that we're going to shut them down or completely stop them. They are too good to do that, but we just have to make it tougher for them.

**Q. : Hey, Coach. Have you faced a player like Bell before and how do you expect to handle her?**

KENNY BROOKS: Face a player like Bell a lot when you play in the ACC. There is a lot of them. Obviously with Bell, I know she's going to be a very high draft pick. She's an extremely talented player and she's in a system that really, really suits her. And so, you know, using the term green light, you know, sometimes people feel like you can go and gun it but she has a green light in her situation where she has the ability to create. She is much more than just a shooter. Much more than just a scorer. She does a lot for her team. She's an emotional leader for her group. We understand that. We played against people similarly talented, whether it is this year in the past when you have the Uriques but a lot of people that we face in the ACC. But she's a tremendous talent, and it's actually fun watching her when you don't have to scout to play against her. We know she's going to present more challenges than just what's on the surface. She's a great basketball player.

**Q. : Obviously when Liz and Kayla went out in the ACC tournament other players had to kind of step in and fill in the gaps, Kayana and Aisha got more playing time. Do you see the impact of that carrying over into them playing with maybe a little bit more confidence here in the NCAA tournament?**

KENNY BROOKS: You know, it was a great opportunity for them to shine, but I don't think it's going to help their confidence. Their confidence was never low. They're



good basketball players, and they know they're good basketball players. It was just their opportunity to step up and help the team in a different way. Kayana Traylor is no -- she's no stranger to scoring the basketball. Averaged 15 points a game for Purdue. She came here for the sole reason that she wanted to be on a team where maybe she didn't have to do as much, but she was going to contribute. And she wanted to get to this moment and she wanted to be able to play in the NCAA tournament. And when I recruited her, she said I don't need to have the ball in my hand all the time, I don't need to score all of the points. I want to be a contributor to a really good basketball team, and that's what she has been able to do. Before the tournament, she texted me and said what do I need to do to help us win this thing. That just goes to show you the confidence that she has. And she's willing to step up and that's like a lot of our kids. It is just that we are we're very talented across the board so they all sacrifice. They all sacrificed a little bit because they could be a little bit more maybe somewhere else but they sacrificed because they want to get to this point where they can continue to win. Thanks, guys.