

Atlantic Coast Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 3, 2022

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

Virginia Tech Hokies

Coach Kenny Brooks

Aisha Sheppard

Elizabeth Kitley

Postgame Press Conference



Virginia Tech 82, Clemson 60

KENNY BROOKS: To create, just to set the tone this time of year, as well, everyone wipes their slate clean and everyone has new-found life, and Clemson came out and they played well yesterday against Syracuse. And for us to get off to a good start was big for us. Very happy with the win.

I thought we played well during stretches. I thought we got a little bit lackadaisical. Part of that was my fault, part of it was you're trying to coach for that game and you're trying to coach for the next one. That's what tournament play is all about. Just trying to be disjointed and we got disjointed a little bit.

Nevertheless I thought some of our kids stepped up and did a really good job, and now we'll get ready for UNC.

Q. Aisha, you guys were on fire there in the first half. What were you seeing from the Clemson defense or what were you doing to be so effective on offense in the first half?

AISHA SHEPPARD: Clemson's MO is to get you out of rhythm and to kind of speed you up, so we were determined to make sure that we stayed the course and did what we were supposed to do and what we practiced, and we ended up being able to find the open person and knock down shots early.

Q. Elizabeth, in the regular season meeting you were 0 of 2 from the field. This time you scored the first two baskets of the game and obviously had a big game. How were they defending you different already or not

today?

ELIZABETH KITLEY: I think it was pretty similar, their mentality going in, but they were missing one of their biggest players. And also I tried to look at the film from that game and then learn from it, and I think I adjusted better to what they were trying to do.

Q. Kenny, I know 21 turnovers isn't ideal; what stood out to you about those and what can you tweak for tomorrow's game?

KENNY BROOKS: I thought Aisha said it best. Their MO is to make the game messy, and they will sell out to trap. A lot of those came -- well, I think it was half and half, but they were unforced in our opinion. Some of them were. Those are the ones that we have to eliminate because we don't give ourselves a chance, especially on a day like today when we were shooting the ball so well. The more opportunities that we could have gotten, we really could have stretched the lead out quickly.

Some of them were forced by them and their trapping, and they were extremely aggressive until the second half because you get down 30 and you really have nothing to lose.

We didn't handle that stretch well. I thought we kind of -- it was twofold. We kind of got a little lackadaisical with the lead, but I think when Cayla went down and sprained her ankle, it really took some of the air out of us and took us a little while to regroup. I told them in the locker room you have to step up and you still have to play the game. No one is going to step back and give us an opportunity to grieve while she's hurting, and they came after us and really cut into the lead during that point.

Q. Coach Brooks and the players, obviously your two games with Carolina were very contrasting. What did you guys do better in the second game and what are the challenges tomorrow?

KENNY BROOKS: You know, everyone has games like we had. Taking nothing away from Carolina, they did it to us the first time. They beat us in transition. We got



behind. We were a little bit sluggish. Everybody has a game like that. You go back and you look at them and they played, I think, Georgia Tech and they only scored 38 points. I think they got beat 50 -- it's almost like everyone had a game like that this year. We knew we were a better team than that.

Courtney has done a tremendous job with that group, two teams that are very similar, very healthy rivalry. We love competing against them, they love competing against us.

We shored up a few things that we needed to do. We were much better in transition the second game. Ustby is tremendous. She gets up and down the floor. You've got to make sure someone is around her all the time because not only is she like a track star, she's really good at like a point forward for them and really distributing the basketball and you have to have someone around her.

We did a really good job of adjusting, got the ball where we needed to get it to, and it was a really fun game, the second one.

ELIZABETH KITLEY: Yeah, I think transition was super key on that, and also we could not put the ball in the basket the first game whatsoever. So a combination of us making shots and adjusting to what they abused us in the first game.

Q. Do you have any inkling as to how severe Cayla's sprain might be?

KENNY BROOKS: No, it's probably severe enough watching her hobble. I think she was walking out on crutches, so we don't anticipate getting her back tomorrow.

But obviously the great thing for us is that we put ourselves in position, not only from a recruiting standpoint. We're deeper than they were last year. If this was last year it probably would have been devastating to us. But obviously we have kids who can step in. And you're not going to replace Cayla King and what she brings to us. She's like my security blanket, and she does so many things on the defensive end knocks down timely shots. She's a great connector. We value her. But the beauty is that we hope to get her back for the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Kenny, what did you like about you guys' defense tonight?

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, when we played and we were locked in, we did a really good job. We didn't do a good job of keeping them off the line, the free-throw line. I thought that really kept them hanging around.

This very well may be the longest game I've ever been associated with right now. It feels like it's 8:00 at night right now and the game, it just drug on and on and on. Part of it was because she took a couple time-outs early and it kind of threw off our rhythm as far as the media time-outs. Then there were maybe two or three times they had to go to the monitor to see if it was a common foul or intentional foul, and it was just a long game that was drawn out.

You know, we were looking forward to getting back and getting some rest.

Q. Obviously Cayla had to check out early in the first quarter because of foul trouble, but you had Emily guarding Washington late in the first half. What did you like about the way she guarded --

KENNY BROOKS: I love the way she guarded her. It almost was like thunder and lightning. Cayla is Cayla. The way that she defends is a little bit differently. She's methodical and understands angles and does a lot of things. Emily is just strong and still moves her feet just as well.

I thought the combination of those two very early in the game did a really good job, so I was very pleased with that. We're probably going to have to rely on Emily to step up and do even more so in the next few games.

Q. You play North Carolina the next game. You played them before twice already. What do you see in a third game that you did not see in the first two?

KENNY BROOKS: You know what, like I said, the rivalry is very healthy. Courtney is a very good friend of mine. She and I conversate quite a bit throughout the year. She likes what we do, we like what she does. This will be the sixth time we've played them in the last two years, so there's a lot of familiarity. I'm sure she's going to switch things up. As I was walking out to go to the game, her assistants were walking behind me to come scout us. And I told them, you can scout us all you want, but we're going to put in whole new package tomorrow.

And just because there's just so much familiarity, and it's going to come down to a will of ways, who wants to really go out -- who's going to get the 50/50 ball, who's going to get that rebound, who's going to be able to put the ball in the basket.

We know what they're going to do, they know what we're going to do at this time of the year. Like I mentioned before, the sixth time we've played them in the last two years. It's going to be, I think, a heck of a ball game.

Q. I know you haven't watched tape or anything, but how would you evaluate how you did against the zone? Because I think early on it disrupted what you guys were doing but then you got through it later.

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, we won't watch film. We know what we're capable of doing. I don't think UNC is going to play us zone. It was really part me. You get to this point in the year, and I think we had a sizable lead when they went to the zone, and we kept it very vanilla. You're up 30, you're up 24, why show your cards, why do anything. And just basically it was just like, okay, trying to get through it.

You hate to say that because you want to continue to get better and better and better, but at the same time you want to be able to rest kids, you want to be able to not show UNC what we were going to be doing if they did go up to zone. So it was really me that took them out of rhythm. They were part to blame on passes, but the position I put them in wasn't really great, and I could have been better and it would have been better if it was a different circumstance.

Q. For either of the players, obviously bad news with Cayla, but the game itself obviously was a convincing win. How does that affect your mindset going in for the rest of the tournament, getting off to such a great start and now facing a Carolina team that you guys know you can beat?

AISHA SHEPPARD: I think that we have a lot of confidence. There's obviously a lot of things that we need to shore up, but the fact that we were able to play today and get a game under our belt, get ourselves out of the way, I think that we're prepared, and we'll go back and rest and get ready for UNC tomorrow. But I think that we're very confident.

Q. Aisha, in the second game against Carolina, you guys were a lot more successful from the perimeter. Was it a matter of shooting better or did you guys do something differently to get more open shots?

AISHA SHEPPARD: I think our mentality was different. The first time we met, like Liz said and like Coach said, we couldn't put the ball in the basket and we kind of weren't ourselves. I think the second time around we were ready and more prepared for what they were going to do, and we were able to put the ball in the basket because we played better defense that game.

Q. 11:00 a.m. start, you guys looked great off the bat. How do you keep that energy going tomorrow with another 11:00 a.m. tip?

ELIZABETH KITLEY: Now we're used to it. We'll be ready tomorrow at 11:00. We had practice at 11:00 on Tuesday to prepare for this game, and now we have this 11:00 a.m. game under our belt, so we'll be ready for it tomorrow.

KENNY BROOKS: We changed our mindset. I told them we had a 7:00 a.m. pregame, and said, look, come down at 7:00 a.m. and don't just bring your body, bring your mind. I want you to be energetic, I want you to be ready for the day. And when I walked in at 7:00, kudos to our support staff, but they had music playing, music blasting, and for me it felt like it was already midday.

But it is, it is an adjustment. You don't like it, but when you get out there and you see all the little kids who are able to come to the game because you did move the game up to 11:00, that little kid might have been Liz Kitley one day. To be able to have them come out and be able to see and make some noise, I guess when you win it's worth it, but ask me tomorrow when it's 6:30 and I have to get up again for the same meal.

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