

Atlantic Coast Conference Women's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 4, 2022

Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

Virginia Tech Hokies

Kenny Brooks

Georgia Amoore

Kayana Traylor

Postgame Press Conference

Virginia Tech 87, North Carolina 80

KENNY BROOKS: I don't know if I have enough energy for opening statement, but I'll tell you what, I've never been prouder of a group of kids, the way they -- in the face of adversity, they never wavered.

A little bit over 24 hours ago, we walked into here and we were very healthy. And then whatever it is, 30 hours later, two of our main players are not with us, and we very well had reason to just say, you know what, we gave it a valiant effort. But they didn't. They regroup really quick. We had to get to halftime so we could make some adjustments and figure out how we were going to play the second half. And from that point on, they all believed. They all believed. They all stepped up. They played extremely well.

I can go down the list. Aisha Sheppard was unbelievable, especially in the second half. KT did a tremendous job keeping us afloat defensively. Deja Kelly is a tremendous player but you have to make her work for everything, and I thought KT did a tremendous job and Emily Lytle as well defensively on her. D'asia Greg did a great rebounding the basketball.

And this one right here to my left, I told her probably -- after she made the three, I said, Look, you've got to play like you're the best player on the floor right now. There's no Liz out there, there's no outlets, and you're going to have to really dominate and dominate the ball and put the shot, but also facilitating for your teammates. And she did a tremendous job.

Extremely proud of these kids. It's probably one of the more gratifying wins of my career, just because of the way



they fought back. It'll be one that I'll always remember because they fought for each other, and it was a great win for our program.

Q. Just wanted to ask about Liz and about her status and what's going on.

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, I don't. Out of precaution, we decided not to play her. It's painful for her to lift it at the moment. We haven't gotten her diagnosis of what's going on with her yet. But she's too valuable for us to try to put her back out there. She tried. And obviously with hopes of an NCAA run and with some time and some rest, we didn't want to further injure anything right now, so we want to make sure we get it checked out.

Q. The fact that Liz got hurt in the first half, you're down eight in the third quarter and you still win this game, what kind of statement do you think you made about -- what does that show about your team?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Just our grit. Once we saw Liz go down, it kind of hurt us all emotionally. But at that point in time, there's nothing to do but to do it, and we came this far, we might as well win it. That's what Coach said. I think we just really did a good job of pulling together.

KAYANA TRAYLOR: I think coming into the game we knew we all had to step up because we weren't going to have Cayla. And then when Liz went down, it just emphasized that even more. I think it goes to show our chemistry and our trust with each other and just wanting to really play for each other and play for our coaches.

Q. Coach, I don't know if you were playing 3D chess yesterday, but you said UNC was going to come out in the zone, and they played a lot of zone in the first half. Liz went down, you guys really changed your attack on the fly. I was wondering if you could talk about the process of that in the game?

KENNY BROOKS: Well, it did catch us off guard a little bit. They were mixing up the defenses in the first half and they kind of went to the zone exclusively in the third. They may have played some man-to-man. But we had to just



readjust.

I have play calls, and when you have a 6'6" All-American, probably 75 percent of them are geared towards her or play off of her. And with the group that we had out there, we kind of went to a different philosophy with spreading the floor a little bit more and trying to attack. And once we told them what we wanted -- you know, they attack a little bit differently when Liz is in the game and when she's not. And once they really got adjusted to playing that way -- and we saw some wrinkles in the game. We saw some things we wanted to exploit through their zone.

And because they were in it and we got to see it over and over again, we were able to exploit it in some areas. And then when they went back to man, we really got Aisha Sheppard going coming off the highball screen and got her really involved, and I think that was a big key for us.

Q. Georgia, can you take us through the and-one bucket at the end of regulation, which at the time obviously gave you guys the lead? And Kenny, is that an example of her playing like the best player on the floor?

KENNY BROOKS: Well, this what I told her and I'll let her answer right after. We drew it up. It's backyard basketball, it's not a play. We wanted to get her the ball. We knew they were going to put a lot emphasis on Aisha Sheppard if we were trying to go for a hand-off. And we faked the hand-off and when she turned the corner, I knew that she had an angle.

So when I drew it up, I said you're going to go here, you're going to fake it, you're going to turn it, you're going to get go a blank blank bucket, and she did it. She went and got the blank blank bucket. It just goes to show you she's a good listener.

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yeah, the trust that Coach has in me to run that obviously speaks volumes. But I turned that corner -- I don't think I faked a hand-off. That lane was just wide open and I saw it and I took it and had all the trust that I was going to make it and draw the foul.

Q. With two and a half minutes, Emily Lytle grabs an offensive rebound. After that she scored the lay-up, 10-0 run, you guys pull away. Only 10 offensive rebounds today. How crucial was that moment?

KENNY BROOKS: It's ironic because it seems like that's what really kept them in the game. They were going and we stopped them initially. But they're big. They're really big, and obviously we had to play smaller without Liz. So their second jump was really quick and they were getting

offensive rebounds which really kept them around and even when they had the lead.

So for us to be able to go -- Emily was huge all day, all game, whether it showed up in the tat sheet or not. And that rebound, that offensive rebound, the stick back was huge for us. It gave us momentum when it seemed like we were kind of just climbing an uphill battle and that really put us over the top and we were able to solidify the win after that.

Q. To either of the players, are you surprised they didn't try to go inside more after Liz went out of the game?

GEORGIA AMOORE: I mean, obviously UNC have Deja Kelly, Ustby, Littlefield. Their guard presence is really strong. I don't think they were necessarily going to rely on their inside game when the outside game is really talented, so I wasn't too shocked about it.

Q. Georgia, following up on the go-ahead shot, huge part of your game confidence to be able to turn the corner and take the lane and the ability for such a tough finish?

GEORGIA AMOORE: Yeah, I mean, at the start of the season, finishing probably wasn't my strong suit, but I think in the tournament, it's a completely different game. All those buckets are vital and you have to stay focused. I think a lot of the times I do a move and during individuals he'll just tell me I lose focus on the shots. So just staying locked in on the lay-up, that's what I've been doing these past couple of games, I think.

Q. Kenny, I assume are you going to shut down Liz for the rest of the ACC Tournament? And if so, to the players, tomorrow will be your third game in three days, including overtime today. If you don't play Liz tomorrow, you're looking at basically a six-person team. How much do you guys have left in the tank for tomorrow?

KENNY BROOKS: Well, we'll wait and obviously -- we're going to decide -- we're going to be cautious with Liz, very cautious with her. I can't listen to her because she'll want to play.

So we have to make sure -- we feel like we've positioned ourselves to make a nice strong run beyond the ACC Tournament, so we're going to do what's best for her and her future. And I'll give them a chance to elaborate on your second question, but you're in the ACC Tournament, you've battled to get this far. You didn't battle here to come out tomorrow and cash it in. We'll find a way. We'll

find a way.

And that's what this group has done all year long. They're extremely talented. If this had happened to us last year, it might have been gloom and doom. But with the addition of Kayana and Emily and some of other players getting stronger, we're deep enough to sustain something that's happened like it is the last two days.

GEORGIA AMOORE: I mean, it's the tournament. It would be selfish of us to go out there and not give everything we've got. As to left in the tank, I've got plenty.

Q. Kenny, this is the first time in school history you have made the ACC semifinals. What kind of accomplishment do you feel to finally reach this round?

KENNY BROOKS: You know, we've done a lot of firsts this year, first -- a lot. I told you guys before, this is the best team that I've had since I've been here, and I've never been able to go out there and compete with the best. Courtney does a tremendous job with her program. She and I are good friends. We talked about it. I'd much rather play somebody else six times in a two-year span than them, and they're getting very, very talented. But I'll tell you what, that was a heck of a basketball game.

I know people in the stands had to be entertained because you saw two teams leaving it all out there on the line.

With my group, I'm just extremely proud of them. We've had a change of culture, and they walk out there and they expect to win.

We celebrated this, we'll watch a little bit of the next game and then we'll be back on. I told Wes, I'll see you at the tournament. They handle business, we'll have an opportunity to play them again after just playing them six days ago.

Q. What did you guys like most about your second quarter defense? You guys -- Liz checks out and then you guys switch to a zone and I think you guys limited them to 6 of 19.

KENNY BROOKS: Yeah, I don't know why. I know they love us. I know they trust us, but for some reason we just get off to a slow start. North Carolina was the aggressor in that first quarter. Ustby in particular. They were the aggressor, we played on our heels, then all of a sudden we figured it out and we dug our heels in.

Last time we played them, they were up 22-9 or something like that in the first quarter when we played them in

Blacksburg, and then we dug in and then we were able to get some stops. We've played off of the scout. We got into our gaps, made it really tough for them and then we rebounded the basketball.

I thought the last three and a half quarters we did a tremendous job of that, but the first quarter I thought they were the aggressor, and we were very fortunate to only be down six. We felt that and we knew that, so it was time to dig in, and we were much better for the rest of the game.

Q. Kayana, when Liz goes out and you don't have Cayla and you face a deficit like you guys did, but you locked down and played team defense, what was it like in that huddle when you guys are talking as players, and what was that mentality that you guys took and ran with over the last three, four quarters?

KAYANA TRAYLOR: Yeah, like I said, I think it was really we wanted to do it for each, we wanted to do it for Liz and Cayla, because obviously they wanted to be out there and couldn't. So we just wanted to make sure that we left everything out on the floor and didn't have any regrets. So I think that was the mindset and just getting through like every single possession.

Q. Coach, you spoke earlier in the year about how a lot of teams in the ACC have sort of taken on this physical mindset. What did you like about your team's physicality today and sort of matching UNC's?

KENNY BROOKS: We endured it, we handled it, and then we started to dish it out as well. If you're going to be successful in this league, you've got to be able to do so.

You know, I'm watching Carolina grow up right in front of my eyes. I'm watching those kids, they were sophomores -- they were freshmen last year, sophomores this year, and they continue to get -- and they're big. Ustby is one of the better players in our league. But our kids have done a tremendous job of just really not backing down. We need a tough rebound, KT goes in there flying, her and Eva. They just collided mid-air and my baby girl got up, and I'm like, ooh, I'm glad she got up.

The way we've been able to handle that, because if we can handle physicality -- we are a finesse team, we are a three-point shooting team, and Liz gets a lot on the perimeter and whatnot. But what we're proving is that we can go out there and we can play a physical style, as well, and beat you at that game, as well.

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