The Virgin Islands Consortium

Virgin Islands Women Begin AmeriCup on Friday With Gold Medal Aspirations

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The Virgin Islands Women's Basketball team are feeling confident as they get ready to play in the 2021 AmeriCup in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Along with crowning a regional champion the tournament will serve as a stepping stone for the 2022 FIBA World Cup as the top 4 teams of the tournament will advance to play in the qualifiers for that tournament.

The Virgin Islands were drawn into Group A with Canada, Brazil, Columbia, and El Salvador. Group B consists of the United States, Dominican Republic, Argentina, Puerto

Rico and Venezuela. The top four teams in each group will qualify for the quarterfinals of the tournament.

The Virgin Islands games on Friday against Columbia and on Saturday against Canada will tip-off at 12:10. They will have Sunday off before playing Brazil Monday at 3:10 before concluding the group stage of the tournament on Tuesday against El Salvador at 12:10. All group games will be on ESPN+ for Virgin Islands residents.

The quarter finals will take place on Thursday June 17, the semifinals on Friday June 18 and the championship game will be played on Saturday June 19.

The Virgin Islands qualified for the AmeriCup by winning a silver medal in the CentroBasket Championship in March. A press release from the Virgin Islands basketball federation said “Virgin Islanders Imani Tate and Anisha George were both named to Centrobasket’s All-Star 5, as the two led the tournament in scoring and rebounds per game.”

This will be the USVI’’s first appearance in the AmeriCup since 2017, when they finished fifth. In that tournament’s group phase they played their group opponents for 2021, Brazil and Columbia. The Virgin Islands upset Brazil 67-60 in overtime and narrowly lost to Colombia 70-63 in that edition of the competition.

Coming into the tournament the Virgin Islands are ranked 49th in the FIBA World Rankings. Group opponents Canada are ranked 4th; Brazil are ranked 15th ; Columbia are ranked 39th and El Salvador are ranked 85th in the same rankings. The United States are the current No. 1 team in the world.

Since the loss to Colombia, “the two teams tangled at the CAC games in 2018 with Colombia winning 67-55. At the Pan American Games in 2019, ISV fell in nail-biting 69-66.” according to a press release by the Virgin Islands Basketball Federation.

Their games against Colombia and El Salvador have been highlighted by FIBA’s website in an article: “Six Must-watch Games in FIBA Women's AmeriCup 2021.”

The FIBA article said “Last time they met in Centrobasket, Virgin Islands took home the silver medal and an AmeriCup qualification with their 12-point win over El Salvador. El

Salvador took fourth place, the final qualifying spot for the AmeriCup, but found weaknesses in Virgin Islands' game in the loss" about the El Salvador matchup and "the group includes both Canada and Brazil and fighting for third place means less of a chance of having to play a team like USA in the Semi-Finals" about the Columbia game.

The press release from the federation said that the Virgin Islands are presently on a four game winning streak versus El Salvador and that the Virgin Islands matchup against Canada will be the first time the nations meet. Canada finished second in the 2019 AmeriCup.

The semifinalists of the AmeriCup will qualify for one of four FIBA Women's Basketball World Cup qualifying tournaments which are scheduled to take place in February of 2022 according to a press release by the Virgin Islands Basketball Federation.

The Virgin Islands players have higher aspirations than just making the semifinals and qualifying for the World Cup qualifiers, they want the AmeriCup gold.

Imani Tate, who became the first women's basketball player to record a triple-double for the Virgin Islands national team in a victory against the Dominican Republic during the CentroBasket Championship , said "to win obviously, we want to get as far as we can, I think we can take it really far. We have some hard competition in Canada, Columbia and Brazil but I feel like we have a team that is very gritty and we like to do a little more than other teams do because we are so overlooked as a small team. I think we are going to go out there, fight hard, play defense and do everything we need to do and get the gold hopefully" when asked what her expectations were for the AmeriCup in an interview with WTJX.

She credits her teammates with their role in her triple-double performance "you can't do it without your teammates, you know points and rebounds you can get by yourself but assists you need great people around you." in the same interview.

Akeema Richards, said "I expect to win gold. We have a great team, we have a lot of depth in a lot of positions, I am truly confident in everybody that has a role on this team" and Brittney Matthew said "I expect for everyone to compete, just give their all, we've been preparing since the last tournament and we have the chemistry, it's just about the execution now and we should be fine" the players said when asked what they expect from the tournament in an interview with WTJX.

Anisha George is feeling confident about the Brazil rematch and said “We’ve beat them the last time and they are coming for their revenge and we are going to beat them again” in an interview with WTJX.

The Virgin Islands roster for the AmeriCup: forward Natalie Day (Portland University), guard Kadesha Barry (Southern University), guard Akeema Richards (Delaware University), guard Imani Tate (Albany University), guard/forward Taylor Jones (Detroit), center Anisha George (North Texas University), center Alexis Boston (Labette CC), guard Lanese Bough (Nebraska Omaha), guard Shomyra Francis (Weatherford CC), forward Molina Williams (Charlotte University), forward Naja Ngongba (Woodbridge High School) 5-11 and guard Brittney Matthew (Stephen F. Austin).

The staff for the tournament will be Head Coach Tajama Ngongba, Assistant Coach Clint Williams, Team Manager R. Jalani Horton, Doctor Dr. Albert Titus, Trainer Angel Mateo, Trainer, Creative Designer Jamal Samuel and Head of Delegation Donald Bough.

Coach Ngongba, who played in the inaugural season of the WNBA and left St. Croix after Hurricane Hugo, spoke about what it means to coach the Virgin Islands in an interview with WTJX. She said “Coaching the national team has been an amazing honor and privilege, I can’t begin to express how thankful I am and I give all the glory to God for being able to come out here and work with these young ladies and give my all as they give me everything.”

Virgin Islander Aliyah Boston will be playing for Team USA, who won the 2019 AmeriCup, in the competition which she has represented at multiple youth levels previously. She won gold medals with Team USA at the 2019 FIBA U19 World Cup, 2018 Youth Olympic Games, 2018 FIBA U17 World Cup and 2017 FIBA?Americas U16 Championship

There will be fans in attendance in San Juan as tickets are available for fully vaccinated individuals. The federation asked “the entire Virgin Islands to support the women from the territory” in their press release.

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