

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Nebraska vs Vanderbilt

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Paycom Center

Vanderbilt Commodores

Mark Byington

Tyler Tanner

Tyler Nickel

Media Conference



Nebraska 74, Vanderbilt 72

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Vanderbilt student-athletes Tyler Nickel and Tyler Tanner and Head Coach Mark Byington.

We'll start with an opening statement from Coach.

MARK BYINGTON: The hardest thing when you're in a tournament like this is there's a side of it with hurt and dejection, and you put everything into it. We were a play away, an inch away, from being in the Sweet 16.

You know, it's going to take a while for us to get over, but I think it's going to be a point that we're going to look back and think of the unbelievable journey this season has been, how great these guys were to coach, how great these guys were for Vanderbilt, the memories they made along the way.

But this one hurts. We felt like we were good enough to make a run. You know, there's, whatever you want to say, 20 or 30 plays. If one of them is different, the outcome is different. That's hard for us.

The harder thing is this is such a great group. I mean, unbelievable group to coach, to be around every single day. We started this thing in June, and every single day -- we didn't want it to end. I know they didn't want it to end. That's the way they played today. They competed. They played the right way. You got to dare to be great.

Unfortunately, when you're competing at the highest level, sometimes there's the side of it that you got to risk. You

got to risk putting yourself on the line, putting yourself in a situation, and you got to risk that you could be on the losing end, but these guys competed in an unbelievable way. I couldn't be more proud of them.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for our student-athletes.

Q. For Tyler Nickel, in the second half you had four threes. What allowed you to get open, free yourself up, and start hunting your shot a lot more and find some of the threes to fall?

TYLER NICKEL: Yeah, I mean, my teammates looking for me. You know, the way I play defense, you got to feel behind the drive. We started doing that in the second half and got some shots to fall.

Q. Tyler Tanner, did you feel like you made that last shot?

TYLER TANNER: (Shakes head).

Q. Talk about the emotions of everything that went on in this game and what you were feeling after watching that not go in, similar to kind of how it was against Missouri.

TYLER TANNER: Yeah, it hurts pretty bad being that close, especially hard-fought game. It was electric the whole time through. Big crowd presence.

Yeah, it hurts that the season is over, yeah.

Q. You mentioned the crowd. What was it like playing in this atmosphere? Have you ever played in anything similar to this?

TYLER NICKEL: Yeah, I mean, I would say, like, most away games in the SEC are pretty similar, but I mean, never had a neutral site game. It never really felt like that. Shout-out to their fans. They travel well. They support their team, but actually, I thought it made the environment really fun to play in, so...

Q. My question is for Tyler Tanner. You had a huge impact on defense tonight. Do you go into games with a target number of steals, or what's the secret behind



your quick hands?

TYLER TANNER: Yeah, a lot of it is instinctual that I've been using to make me better since I was a kid. Today we thought ball pressure was going to be a big part of the game, and it helped us out a lot with the shooters that they have in No. 21 and covering up some of the mistakes we make behind the ball.

The coaches were big on ball pressure, and I just wanted to go execute that.

Q. I'm curious, Coach, what film in the Big Ten did you really watch on Nebraska to kind of build your plan --

MARK BYINGTON: We'll come back to that.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for our student-athletes.

Q. Tyler Tanner, you finished the game with 27 points. Nebraska tried to mix up a bunch of coverages in your face. How did you approach that, and how were you able to break that down and find shots for your teammates and shots for yourself to fall?

TYLER TANNER: We watched a good amount of film on the weak parts of their defense and where they would over-rotate and where I would be able to try to attack more as they tried baseline and have a lot of help if you go baseline, so more of it was the seam drives and middle drives.

That was just the coaches telling me the plan and trying to execute it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen. Questions for Coach.

Q. I'm curious what Big Ten tapes did you really study on the teams that had success against Nebraska and kind of how did you come up with a plan to really be so aggressive and kind of get a feel for how the game was going to be officiated to kind of develop how you wanted to defend them?

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, I mean, I thought the game was officiated fairly. You know, it's two physical teams. It's sometimes hard. There was a call or two at the end I thought were a little bit out of character, but I thought they did a good job.

The film that we studied is obviously you're studying most recent. We didn't spend a lot of time on the Troy film, but we watched Purdue from the Big Ten Tournament. Really analyzed that.

Then the main one that we tried to replicate was their game at UCLA. I thought UCLA did a good job, especially on the defensive end. Then we also watched the Iowa game. That's kind of the main three.

They're hard to score against. I've gone against a lot of defenses. I think I've coached 13 years as a head coach and whatever as an assistant. That's a unique, really, really good defense. Early on we kind of had trouble finding some gaps, and I thought we did a great job in the second half of finding some creases in there and being able to make plays.

The odd thing is we're a great free-throw shooting team, and tonight we weren't. We needed one or two more. We missed two box-outs at the end of the game that we did a great job boxing out. We missed two box-outs at the end of the game.

This is going to take a long time for myself and this team to get over, because we know we're a good team. We got beat by a good team. That's a really good team.

That's one of the best environments or toughest environments that I've ever coached in. The fans were incredible for them. Supportive and loud. I thought our guys got down maybe ten in the first half, but they never really changed their belief. And then we, like I said, we're a play away from being in the Sweet 16, so that's hard.

Q. Coach, what changed in the second half? Ten threes in the second half compared to just ten made field goals in the first half. What was said at halftime that allowed for your guys to open up from long range and be able to knock down shots?

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, we watched -- we did miss probably three or four open threes in the first half. That would have helped. There were some good opportunities there.

What we did is we watched film at halftime, and we showed the guys the looks. Sometimes it's hard to see, but I could tell they were locked in at halftime and saw the different opportunities that we could get. It was more so just getting to the paint and finding movement after that.

In the first half we were shooting against contested shots against big bodies, and it wasn't good looks. Then the second half we found much better looks.

Q. You expect a tough game in the second round of the tournament, but I don't think too many teams have had to deal with an atmosphere like that. How do you

rationalize that? Do you just look at it as you're just unlucky, or you were you under-seeded? How do you take that?

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, I mean, that's probably a lot that we might think about it. You know, when you play in an environment like this, I know it had to be incredible on TV. It was an incredible game. It sucks we were on the side we were on, but I mean, a high-level game.

I'm sure the crowd lifted them up and had them playing. They played so hard. But second guess where you're put or your seeding and all these other things, you know, it just adds to the list of things that you're kind of sitting here thinking, I just want one play back, and we win the game in this environment, and that would have been even more rewarding.

You know, it's hard when you felt like you were that close to winning and didn't.

Q. I wanted you to talk a little bit about overall construction of this year's team, the internal development of Tyler Tanner, the way that you were able to get Tyler Nickel as a transfer to play at a high level after another year in your program, AK Okereke transferring in, Devin McGlockton and just the impact of some of these guys. How proud are you of your program and the way you run it and the way that you guys were able to get so much production out of your team this year?

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, this team is going to be remembered for a long time in Nashville and Vanderbilt and the things they've done. It's an incredible team.

Maybe they weren't the most high-profile players in the portal, but it was the right guys. You could see why I'm so proud and why I love them so much. I mean, the way they played tonight. They care about each other. They care about winning. They care about the right things.

There is a lot of hurt in that locker room right now because they do care. They did not want it to end. They love each other. That's not in every locker room.

Some of the things you can kind of pick out, whether they score, make threes, or whatever else. It's more so just the love and care that they have for each other, the fact they really want to win, and they're about the right things.

I'm really going to miss this group. I'm really, really going to miss this group.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

