

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Miami (OH) vs Tennessee

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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA  
Xfinity Mobile Arena

## Tennessee Volunteers Coach Rick Barnes Nate Ement Ja'Kobi Gillespie

### Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: All right, we have student-athletes from the University of Tennessee. Tennessee is sixth seed in the Midwest region. This is their 28th appearance in the NCAA Tournament, including their eighth straight. The Vols earned an at-large bid after finishing the season 22-11. They are 31-28 all time in the Tournament, including 12-7 under Coach Barnes. They've made the regional final three times, including in 2025.

Questions for the student-athletes?

**Q. First is for Nate. I wanted to ask you about your Virginia upbringing and the hoops scene in the DMV area. How do you feel that your grassroots experience has prepared for college and kind of these big stages to be on.**

NATE AMENT: Yeah, hoops in the DMV is huge, obviously. Growing up, I was playing outside in the park the with everybody. Everybody loves hoops out there. And when it comes to high school, everybody loves high school hoops. It's really big in DMV. I was always playing in front of a lot of people. We were always the main focus in DMV, high school hoops. So that kind of correlates, I guess.

**Q. Nate, just how's the health right now? Did you feel like it was good to knock some of the rust off last week at the SEC Tournament?**

NATE AMENT: Yeah, for sure. I wanted to play the next game after the injury after Vanderbilt. It was good for me to get out there and get some reps under my belt and get prepared for the tournament.



**Q. This one is for Ja'Kobi. I wanted to ask about how you feel about the SEC, just the gauntlet that that is, how that prepares you for these types of win-or-go-home games and the energy you have to play against every single night. How that bring the best out of your game?**

JA'KOBİ GILLESPIE: Yeah, I feel like playing in the SEC, it's a good game every night. I feel like most of our games have been close. I feel like that will help us here in this tournament.

**Q. Can you guys talk about -- did you watch Miami of Ohio play last night? What did you learn from watching them and preparing for tomorrow's game?**

NATE AMENT: Yeah, we watched them. A lot of us watched them together. They're a really good team. They play a really exciting brand of basketball. It was fun to watch them play. We enjoyed it.

Again, they're really talented. We got our work cut out for us. They got talented players at every position, so we have to be locked in from the jump.

JA'KOBİ GILLESPIE: Yeah, I mean, it's really good basketball. They play together really well. So, yeah, we definitely got to be locked in tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Any other questions? Good. Hey, quick, easy. Appreciate it. Good luck tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We're joined by Tennessee head coach Rick Barnes. He's in his 11th season at Tennessee, leading to them to the Tournament eight times. He's coaching in his 30th NCAA Tournament.

Coach, opening statement, please?

RICK BARNES: Again, excited for our team to be here, our university and really, we all appreciate the work that our players put in to get us here and just hope that we can play really good basketball. Certainly, a great deal of respect for Miami of Ohio. Any team that wins 30-plus games, are extremely well coached, mentally tough, play great basketball. We know we have a challenge in front of

US.

**Q. When you have a team that's playing in the first four and you don't know who you're going to get, essentially, does it impact the scout or any preparation that you may have? Because you really don't know until they actually play that game.**

RICK BARNES: It does a little bit, obviously. Monday was a day that, the way we are on our cycle, was a workday, and obviously, we tried to do a little bit of both teams, and then today was the first day because the game was last night. Pretty much probably have about the same amount of time they do to get ready for the game, but there is a difference, as opposed to if you knew exactly who you were going to play on Sunday, you would have a couple of days to get ready, but it is what it is and time to go play some basketball.

**Q. To add onto that question, how do you get your players in the right mindset knowing that Miami is coming in with a wave of momentum, all the national buzz about them and everything else that's going on? They'll probably have a lot fans here, as I'm sure you guys will as well. With all these intangible things going on with a story line like this, how do you prepare your team for that?**

RICK BARNES: It's a great story line, number one, and they've earned it. If you go through the season and do what they did. Certainly, I thought they were terrific last night. Everybody is going to talk about their three-point shooting, but there's so much more than that. I understand, and there should be a buzz about them because they're a really good basketball team and extremely well-coached, play hard, and that do everything you have to do to win that many basketball games. We have to do what's got us here at a very high level. We certainly have great respect for them.

I think our team understands that we're not one of those team that can just show up and beat anybody. We learned that this year. We lost some games that we felt like we should have won. We learned from that. But you do know that this time of year, that if you're playing this time of year, you're a really good basketball team.

Our guys, again, whether they have a lot of fans or not in the tournament, when you're in a situation like this, the team that normally wears the darker uniforms, the house is going to cheer for them and all that. It will get decided on the court, and we'll have to play again. We will have to have a great mindset and a great game, competitive mind or it won't go our way.

**Q. Coach, can I just get your thoughts on NCAA expansion? As you know, this is a topic that's been continuous over the year, especially with the bubble, how it turned out going into Selection Sunday.**

RICK BARNES: There's always going to be a bubble, I don't care how much you expand it. People are going to say I should have whatever. I just don't see us taking it more than three weeks. I don't. I think that's where it should be because right now, this is, I think, the best sporting event in the country. Every state can be part of it, and it stretches across our country, and it's a great time of year.

They if I that expand it, I just hope it doesn't go beyond really -- I think it's really hard to ask somebody to win a national championship and play more than six games. If they expand it, I think it has to continue with play-in games or something like that. That level with everything that goes on with this tournament.

**Q. Rick, I know you've been in Philadelphia many times over many years in your coaching career. I know Fran Dunphy is an old friend of yours. You got to coach against him in an NCAA Tournament. Curious if, obviously everybody is very busy, but do you have a moment to catch up with him or any of your other friends in town.**

RICK BARNES: I would like to. Fran and I, we started -- we met each other back in the late 70s, early 80s. He was at American University and I was at George Mason. Back then, summer league was a big thing in the D.C. area. I can't tell you how many times he and I stood shoulder to shoulder at the Jelleff League like or one of the summer leagues watching teams play. Terrific basketball coach, but obviously, one of the most incredible people you could ever meet. So I do hope I get a chance to see him.

I love Philly. I've always had great respect for this town, the basketball here. It's a good place to be.

THE MODERATOR: Other questions for coach? Anybody? All right, thanks, Coach Barnes. Good luck tomorrow.

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