

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Tennessee vs Virginia

Sunday, March 22, 2026

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Xfinity Mobile Arena

Tennessee Volunteers
Coach Rick Barnes
Ja'Kobi Gillespie
Bishop Boswell
Nate Ament
Media Conference

79 Tennessee, Virginia 72

THE MODERATOR: All right, we have head coach Rick Barnes and Tennessee players. We'll start with a short opening statement from Coach. We'll do questions for Nate, Bishop and Ja'Kobi.

RICK BARNES: Just really excited and proud of our guys. They worked hard, they had to, to play a team like Virginia. I got the most respect for Ryan Odom and what he's done in a short time there at Virginia, but really proud of our guys. Both teams played extremely hard throughout. Every possession matters. A great win for us, but I was really proud of these guys. They fought through a lot of things that maybe we didn't have to, but they found a way to fight through it.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for student-athletes.

Q. This one is for Nate. I know you have been battling through a lot of injuries. Do you feel like playing a Virginia team as a Virginia native yourself gives you a little extra juice to fight some of the extra stuff you have been dealing with?

NATE AMENT: No, not necessarily. For me, I wanted to do it for my teammates and this university. I owe them so much. The least I could do is fight through this.

Q. This one is also for Nate. Just the guys in general, Nate, you had a slow start to the first half. Second half, you were much more aggressive, scored the



opening eight points. Was the message to you to get more involved? What led to that change coming out into the second half?

NATE AMENT: I think the game just slowed down for me a little bit. Also, I was fighting fatigue in the first. Sitting out a couple of games, it's hard to bounce back, but found my footing in the second. Also, my teammates for finding me, giving me open shots. I was trying to be more aggressive, make sure I was being aggressive also, not being too aggressive that I turn the ball over.

Q. Another question for Nate. This being your first NCAA Tournament, how have you leaned on Ja'Kobi and Bishop as lead guards and dependable players?

NATE AMENT: Yeah, they've just been super reliable, down the stretch especially, but these guys throughout this whole season have been super helpful to me just trying to learn the system, learn college basketball, but also I can lean on them when I'm not playing my best or I need a little extra help every day. These guys have been tremendous, not only this tournament, but throughout the whole season.

Q. Nate, after making one combined field goal the past two games against Vanderbilt and Miami, how does having 16 points tonight help your confidence moving forward in the tournament?

NATE AMENT: I wouldn't say my confidence really wavered. To me, it was trusting that I don't have to do much to help this team win. We have talented guys. I don't have to come in and play every minute, score every point for us to win because we have talented guys on the floor.

Q. The way you guys moved the ball in the first half, what allowed you guys to make such crisp passes and get open shots for people?

BISHOP BOSWELL: I thought our bigs did a good job of screening, allowing us to hit them on the short row, the way they were kind of blanking, get our hands, and you also skip it, moving it around. If we moved it and screened them and executed the game more, we would be able to get open looks --



JA'KOBI GILLESPIE: Yeah, what he said. Just knowing what we're looking for offensively, Just trusting what Barnes is putting us in and, yeah, just trusting each other to make the right plays.

Q. Ja'Kobi, I was wondering if you could talk about your thought on that lea that seemed like it was almost from half court and the very next play, you had that desperation lob for the alley-oop. What was going through your mind both of those plays and how much do you think that helped?

JA'KOBI GILLESPIE: Yeah, the three, I was definitely lucky. Getting a stop and then being able to convert in transition was good for us because it was harder to score when they had a set defense. Getting out and running was working for us.

Q. This one is for Bishop, I remember you mentioned a little while back about the physicality you guys were able to play with. Can you touch on how that preparation and the way that your strength really helps you in a game like this that got pretty physical towards the end.

BISHOP BOSWELL: Yeah, we have one of the best strength teams in the country, if not the best. Every other day, we're lifting. There's days we come in, we don't want to lift, but day after a game, we're going to get in. I think we show it night in and night out, how physical we are. Coach says every time someone comes to play us they talk about how they have to up the physicality, but what we do every day in practice set in. You can't emulate that getting ready for a game. I think that's a big part of us is being physical.

Q. How does Bishop having 13 points and 9 assists make your job so much easier on offense? We know he's great on defense but how does that open up the floor for everyone else as a facilitator?

JA'KOBI GILLESPIE: It means everything. If he's playing like that, that makes us a whole 'nother team. I think we're going to be really hard to beat with him doing that and, yeah, I feel like he had a great game today.

Q. This is a question for Bishop and Ja'Kobi. What is it about each other that complements each other's games so well. You guys are probably two of the most communicative guards I've seen in the five games I've seen here. What makes you two work so well together?

JA'KOBI GILLESPIE: I think we just trust each other and really like playing with each other. We're also roommates

on the road, so we can't get enough of each other. So, yeah, I feel like we're just really locked in together.

RICK BARNES: You might want to retract that.

JA'KOBI GILLESPIE: No weird stuff, but, yeah.

BISHOP BOSWELL: I was going to say something similar but sadly, they roomed me with him. I'm with him 24/7 and we're probably in the gym more than anybody in the country. I know I can lean on him. I know how talented he is. Any time I attack the gap and I see him open, I'm betting it's going in.

THE MODERATOR: All right, thank you. We'll open it up to questions for Coach Barnes.

Q. What allowed them to get back in the game until final six minutes and how important would you describe number 30, Dallin Hall for them in that come back?

RICK BARNES: Well, they are a terrific team. Ryan is a terrific coach, he really is. Our team this year, we turned it over in ways that we shouldn't turn it over. Ja'Kobi trying to do too much at some point. Give them credit, they fought back in it, and we were really trying in the end to spread out, take away the three as much as we could. But we're such an active gap team, and sometimes the guys get caught up in what we drill, drill, drill. Felix, a couple times kept getting sucked in and giving up the three to De Ridder which is not what we wanted to do.

They do a good job driving it and get you sucked in wanting to tech out. Both teams I thought played extremely hard. Give them credit. We, again, turned it over some ways that we shouldn't have turned it over.

Q. Coach, what's the main thing you take away from your two games here as you get ready to head to the Sweet 16?

RICK BARNES: I'm really proud of these guys. We started the season with a lot of new guys, I think 11 new people on our team, and that's where it is today I guess in college basketball. They've worked hard for us from the get-go. Nate, it's been hard because he's worked so hard to come down the stretch and have the injury, and he certainly had a hard time the other night and then but he moved better this morning. We saw that. I think he turned it -- I know first time he cut through the lane today, I saw it. He didn't do anything, but I saw it on his face. He's such a tough kid. He fought through it today and really gave us, I thought, a big lift.

I thought some other guys, Jaylen Carey, every one of these guys this year helped us. We need J.P. to keep himself out of foul trouble. That changes us. A big play of the game, and I give Coach Gainey credit for it. When Amari went in the game, that was a big, big defensive stop. We had only one time-out at the time. I knew if we had a stop, we would have to use it to get Nate. And in the back of my mind, I was thinking we might need that one to get it in the way we were handling pressure, but it worked out that we used it, but that was a big stop at that point in time.

And then Ja'Kobi fouled there at the half court. Those are the plays we've got to eliminate. All this is going through my mind right now. I don't even know if I've answered your question. But we found a way. We found a way to get it done. These guys, they've worked hard for us all year and worked hard competing against each other every day and Bishop alluded to that.

We normally have really high-level practices and we believe that it helps us and so, again, all the credit goes to those guys.

Q. Coach, can you speak to after having Zakai for so long, how Ja'Kobi has turned into the point guard you need?

RICK BARNES: One thing they have in common is they are high-level competitors and think they can win the game by themselves, which is a good thing and sometimes not such a good thing. They both have a great way of letting it go when they don't play well. They move on to the next play. That's a God-given talent. I wish more guys had that, but they're got at that. They're both high-level competitors and both incredible endurance. Getting into tournament, I go into the game honestly thinking we'll play Ja'Kobi 40 minutes if we have to and he's able to do it. They're similar in the fact that they're not going to back down regardless of what's in front of them. They're going to compete.

Q. Bishop hit those three three-pointers there in the first half. What did you like about his shooting and what did he give you overall?

RICK BARNES: Do what we practice. And we expect these guys, when they're open, to shoot the ball. I thought Virginia did a really good, especially early in the game job, rebounding the ball. They went and took something away from us that we should have had on both ends, but he's got to. We need that. Amari, those guys, when they're open and their feet are set, all we keep talking about is do what we practice. That's the shot you're going to take in practice, take it now. When Bishop puts up these kind of numbers, and they mentioned it does give us a whole

different look as a team --

Q. You've been coaching Division I basketball as a head coach for 20 years longer than I've been alive. You have seen the game change a lot. Your team tonight shot 55 field goal attempts but only 19 of which were threes and won it the old-fashioned way, 25 attempts from the free-throw line. How do you value tonight's shot selection after such a gritty, grimy way?

RICK BARNES: How do I look after all these years? I'll tell you this, deep down inside, I wish there was no three-point line and everything was played at 15 feet of net. I would be a football coach. We would run the single wing or whatever. We would be running three yards in a cloud of dust. I'm not a -- I don't mind shooting threes with the right guy shooting it, but I believe playing inside out. I still believe there's a great value on putting teams in foul trouble, trying to get to people's benches by doing that.

But I grew up in an era, wasn't a very good player, but literally, you know this, everything was 15 feet and in. That's what it was. I still believe in it and still believe in hard screening, hard cutting. Sometimes, we probably pick and roll more than I would like. We do it some and sometimes I'm good at it. I like it when I look down and see that we've got 20 assists. I like that. On 26 made baskets. I like to see us sharing the ball and I love teams that are balanced. When we have a guy that can go, you have seen us do it through the years with a bunch of guys. We play their strengths but we love balance. We really do. We love balance.

THE MODERATOR: All right, Coach, thanks. Congratulations. Good luck in Chicago.

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