

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 12, 2021

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

## Tennessee Volunteers

### Rick Barnes

#### Postgame Press Conference

Tennessee 78, Florida 66

THE MODERATOR: Questions for coach Rick Barnes.

**Q. Do you have an update on John Fulkerson as far as an injury goes? Do you expect him tomorrow? What was your vision and reaction to that play?**

RICK BARNES: Actually, I did not see it. I'd already looked the other way, turned the other way. I didn't see it. Heard it wasn't good at all, obviously.

They did take him to the hospital just for observation. I think it was more for his eye than anything else. Tomorrow, I don't know right now if we could say we can count on him. Again, we'll wait and see. My gut feeling, he took two pretty good licks right there and I'd be surprised if he is available.

**Q. Defensively twice in a row you've been able to put the handcuffs on Florida. What was it about the game plan?**

RICK BARNES: A really good team effort. I thought we worked hard the last -- well, we've always worked hard, but a big emphasis on our ball screen defense, getting up to touch. We didn't want to get drug out, strung out where we weren't up there, giving their guards a chance to either split it, drag us down to the baseline. We really wanted to have a confrontation right there at the impact of the ball. For the most part we did.

I thought we stayed in our coverage, were disciplined that way when we couldn't get our primary defense, what we wanted. We were switching out. I thought our guards did a really good job when they got a guy on post down low, sit on the post man's hip, get in front. Everybody else knew what was happening. Trying to come in and help as much as we could.

It's just really a good team effort. We can still be better.



We're going to have to be better. We just need to adjust. When you have a player, they start putting their head down, that's when we got to keep backing up in space, force some contested jump shots instead of letting them get fouled or getting to the rim.

**Q. What do you have to do against Alabama that you didn't get done a couple months ago?**

RICK BARNES: I go back to that game. Yves Pons picked up two quick fouls early in that game. Jaden didn't play. He was playing well. I think he drove it, if I can remember right, turned his ankle. It got away from us. We didn't handle it very well.

That was really one of the first games I thought where we were down and didn't know quite how to respond. I think they've gotten better. I'd like to think that we've gotten better. We're going to need everybody. If Fulkerson is not available, we're going to need more guys to step up and help us.

We're going to have to defend a team, I think one of you guys mentioned to Santi, about threes, getting to the rim. Again, we're going to have to play good offense ourselves, take care of the basketball, not have those on-ball turnovers that lead to easy baskets.

**Q. Yves Pons set a Tennessee basketball record with nine blocks, tied the all-time SEC tournament record. Do you think this was his single-best individual defensive performance?**

RICK BARNES: I thought he was terrific. I mean, he was locked in. You could tell it. You could tell the last couple days. From start to the finish, what he had to do down there, the way he plays. I thought he was locked in both ends.

Again, he was terrific, he really was. His blocks were great.

We told our guys at halftime, Hey, Yves going to come get them, you have to clean it up for them. For the most part in the second half, again, that happened for the most part. I



think one of them he went up and tried to block it, we didn't have the backside sealed down.

He was locked in. I kept looking at him asking if he needed a blow. He said, I'm good, I'm good. Just happy for him because, again, he was outstanding.

**Q. Just how big were those minutes from Uros and what was he able to do to keep the sustained minutes on the floor?**

RICK BARNES: I think what it shows, you go back all year long, nobody has been more of a teammate, not seeing the floor the way all players would like to. The last couple days in practice, really this time off as we've been practicing, getting up and down the floor, playing more, it just started working for him. Really started buying into what we need him to do.

He's been really good in practice. I think his size obviously can be a factor for us. He is a guy that when he's out there, he does like to get moving on offense, set screens, just get him rolling consistently, getting himself ready to catch the ball. He loves passing the ball, passes well. His minutes and Yves today, they were on the front line. Those were big minutes.

**Q. A lot of people talk about sort of the unique way Alabama plays the game. People keep saying that. How different is the way they play basketball? Is it an exaggerated version of what some other people do or is it pretty unique?**

RICK BARNES: I think there's other people -- a lot of people that want to shoot the three early. Some people don't believe in the midrange game. If that's what they believe in, that's what they believe in.

Obviously analytics, I think they're really into the analytics where they believe what they're doing is the right way. Nate has done a terrific job. Coach of the Year, well deserving. He's got the personnel to do it. Player of the Year.

Really, I mean, everything they've gotten, they've deserved.

**Q. You mentioned an eye for John Fulkerson. Is it the eye itself, bone around the eye? Is a concussion also a concern?**

RICK BARNES: I don't really know. I really don't. But they just said that -- they said he was fine, they just were taking him to the hospital for observation. Somebody mentioned to me about the eye. That's all I know.

**Q. I'm sure you've seen last couple days it's been kind of a crazy sequence of events. Duke, then Virginia in the ACC tournament, now Kansas in the Big 12, out because of positive COVID tests. As somebody that's likely in the NCAA tournament already, is there any worry for you about continuing on, the risk of that, what happens if you pop up with a COVID issue this close to the NCAA tournament?**

RICK BARNES: I'm not sure, unless you're on it like we are every day, the stress of getting tested weekly, knowing that the one thing you hate is throughout the whole year, the testing protocol, knowing first thing in the morning, 6:00, you're going to get a text, all guys are negative or we got a positive. That's been going on now for, what, four months, five months.

Has it been stressful for everybody? No doubt about it. Players included. We've tried and will continue to handle it the best way we can, do what we need to do there.

But, yeah, it's been a concern all year for everybody. We know it. I don't know the protocols at either the Big 12 or the ACC. All I can tell you is I don't think there's been a better league in the country from start to finish trying to do things the right way and be on top of everything than the SEC. Again, I admire how diligent they've been about everything.

To answer your question, I don't think there's a coach, a player in the country that doesn't worry about that every time we go in and get the swab.

**Q. Do you wish there was a little more cushion between now and the tournament?**

RICK BARNES: I don't think it would matter. I really don't. I think we got to proceed as we say we do. Again, I don't know what their protocol is. I don't know if it was contact tracing. I have no idea. I don't know the protocol, what went on there.

But, no, it's like we said when we started the season late, I didn't think we should. I thought we should have started on time and give us a longer runway. At some point in time it's got to come to a conclusion regardless. I know every player in the country, staff, it's been a major concern knowing things like this could happen.

Again, I don't know the whole deal, but I just hope it works for all of us. It has been a long, trying year for everybody. For the players again, we talked about it this morning, it was a year ago. We actually had a little placard made up for Jordan Bone that we put on our bench today because

he was the one guy, I remember seeing him in the back of the bus a year ago when we walked out of this building, he was devastated. He couldn't believe his college career was over with.

What we talked about was being grateful for what we've been able to have up to this point. Whatever we can get done, be thankful for it, be grateful for it. It's been a long year for lots of people. We've gotten to this point. I just hope we can finish it and finish it strong for everybody.

But there still is a lot to be grateful for because of how far we've come from a year ago.

**Q. Assuming you don't have John tomorrow, is that a situation where you expect to play a lot of Yves at the five, probably see more of Olivier?**

RICK BARNES: I haven't thought about it. But probably. Again, this time of year you got to do what you got to do. Again, I thought Uros was terrific. I like to think if we go to Olivier or E.J., those guys will be ready to roll. Whatever we're going to have to do, this time of year, one game at a time. You try to win and move on.

THE MODERATOR: Coach meant to say Jordan Bowden.

**Q. What did you think about your team's response after the situation with Fulkerson? It was clear with body language that they weren't going to be intimidated or back down.**

RICK BARNES: They were upset. They were. They were very upset. What we tried to talk about was the emotion of it. I think the technical foul called on Josiah was nothing other than, We're not going to let this thing get out of control. I don't think it was that big a deal. Everything can escalate, become a big deal.

The fact that the officials were going to tell them, if they've told them to shut up and quit talking, they keep doing it, whether it's a very little thing as just saying, Hey, he threw the ball at my teammate. Don't throw the ball at my teammate. Referees have a hard enough job. When it gets chippy, players are getting after it, the emotion starts to heat up, it's a tough game to officiate regardless of that.

Our guys have such great respect and love for Fulky, but for each other. We had to calm them down, no doubt about it, because they felt like it was unnecessary. I was glad we were able to get back at it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, everybody.

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