

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 10, 2023

## Missouri Tigers

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

## Dennis Gates

## Kobe Brown

## D'Moi Hodge

### Postgame Press Conference



Missouri 79, Tennessee 71

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to begin with Missouri. We'll begin and ask Coach if he'll give us some general thoughts on the game.

Coach.

DENNIS GATES: Outstanding atmosphere. We knew coming into this game, coming into this arena, that it was going to be a lot of orange. I am proud of our Mizzou fans for coming in and obviously making noise and giving us the energy that we needed to overcome a tough environment, but also a hard-fought game.

I thought these two to my left made outstanding plays, but the key play to me was Nick Honor coming to the timeout and saying, Coach, give me a ball screen.

Sometimes you don't listen to your players. I listen to mine. We gave him a ball screen, and he was able to knock down a big-time three-point shot.

We're proud of what we've accomplished thus far. Looking forward to a tough matchup tomorrow against who I think is the No. 1 team in the country.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Kobe, Tennessee has been a team that's been the top-ranked defense in the country. What have y'all been able to do to be so successful against them?**

KOBE BROWN: Definitely just run. Like to run. Hard to play defense when you can't get back and get in front of the other team.

We try to use that to our advantage. We call it clap-back. We tried to beat them down the floor and get quick shots before they can set up the defense.

**Q. D'Moi, you were flying around on defense today. When people talk about being in the zone, they're talking about offense. What does it feel like to be in the zone defensively?**

D'MOI HODGE: I would say trying to get deflections, trying to get fingers on the ball. We work on those every day in practice. We call it jump to the ball. I try my best to just get a little deflection. It works out in the field for me.

It's mostly for our team defense, how to execute it well.

**Q. Kobe, talk about the big offensive rebound bucket. What did you see?**

KOBE BROWN: Yeah, I saw the ball coming off, and I saw there was like three or four guys on Tennessee's team, they were backing out or just standing there. I tried to slip in. It came my way (smiling). So, yeah, that was pretty much it.

**Q. Coach Gates mentioned the Mizzou fans. Talk about them and how they made the difference.**

KOBE BROWN: They were a huge part of that win. I was surprised to see that many people there. I'm glad they came. Wish I could thank them individually. I'm glad they came. They're the reason we won that game.

D'MOI HODGE: I would say it helps us a lot just knowing we have people that have our back. It just meant a lot to see them all around the building cheering for us, seeing the yellow and black. They helped us in the long run.

**Q. Kobe, this program hasn't been in the semifinals in this conference. What does it mean to be the first team to get to that point?**

KOBE BROWN: It's huge. It's huge. We talk about it all the time. It's big for us. We just come in and do what we



do. Just a bunch of guys that like to play together.

We stay connected. It's showing off every day in practice and the game. I'm glad we made it here and hope we can finish this off.

**Q. Kobe, certainly a scrappy game. You picked up a foul early. You settled into the game, played strong in the paint without fouling.**

KOBE BROWN: Just keeping it in the back of my mind. I definitely didn't need to pick up that second foul early. I knew my team needed me. I knew I needed my team.

I just tried to play smart, play by the rules as much as I could.

**Q. D'Moi, you were the guy tasked with covering Zakai Zeigler in the regular season. What was the biggest difference in Tennessee's offense?**

D'MOI HODGE: I would say he just controls the game, his pace, the way he handles the team, he makes it easy for them to get shots for Santiago, him controlling the ball. With him not in the lineup, that forces Key to be play-maker, which you don't want to be, so I feel like without having Zeigler in the lineup it's harder for them to get into their sets and stuff like that.

I feel like we exploit pressuring them and make their shots harder.

**Q. Kobe, you were picking up a lot of offensive fouls. What did you have to do to make a change?**

KOBE BROWN: We saw that they were trying to force baseline, take the charge. In the huddle all the coaches were telling us, They're trying to take the baseline away, so take one less dribble, skip to the other side. They can't take away both. You can only get one.

We had to use what they were doing against them. It worked out for us in the end.

**Q. Coach Gates always seems like the coolest guy in the room. How much does that inform the way you play?**

D'MOI HODGE: I would say just keeps us calm. We don't get rattled knowing that our head coach not rattled. It's a big plus of a head coach to be so calm. He lets us know we're not in trouble, he got our backs. We can play hard, execute, without even trying to think about the next play, stuff like that. It's just stress free knowing the head coach has faith in us, and we don't have to worry and stress, so

that's good.

KOBE BROWN: Definitely, it plays a big role in our team. I feel like with him not showing all his emotions, it makes it hard for us to show our emotions.

He tells us all the time, If you don't see me yelling, nagging, whatever, then you shouldn't be out there nagging at the refs, each other, whatever. He always wants us to let him take the fall for everything, so we just play off that.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse the student-athletes and continue with questions for Coach Gates.

**Q. About Kobe Brown, how quickly were you able to build a relationship with him? Talk about the fit he's had in your system, also being the Scholar Athlete of the Year.**

DENNIS GATES: I'll talk about him as a person. He's very compassionate, has a high level of empathy. He doesn't know what a stranger is. He bridges any gap between a person who has different background than he does. He is one person that I think can run for mayor of Columbia.

Outstanding young man. When I had the opportunity to sit and talk to he and his parents and family, they were able to articulate and give me what it was that they were looking for, but also I was able to be as transparent and let them know what I wanted and what I was looking for.

I wanted to get his shooting percentage up. I wanted to make him become a better basketball player, one that is showing his versatility. He's answered every part of that demand that I had. But more importantly, outstanding student-athlete, student-athlete. 4.0 GPA. He's just a model kid.

I truly believe whatever the highest award a student-athlete can receive from the NCAA, I would nominate Kobe Brown for it.

**Q. How did you go about so quickly building a fearlessness into this team?**

DENNIS GATES: I think we have a saying of not blinking. When I say don't blink, at that moment in time we are free from distractions. We don't allow the outside conditions to impact our internal belief in each other. We want to stay galvanized and connected as much as possible.

The most important thing through that is you have to practice every day, talk about it every day. We talk about our A core values: friendship, love, accountability and trust, discipline, unselfishness, enthusiasm and toughness.

Those are our A core values that I want them to take inside the classroom and community service and also in between the lines in competition.

Last but not least, I want them to take that with them when the ball stops bouncing, when they become leaders, when they become CEOs, fathers, husbands. Sort of let that guide them. Ultimately we talk about distractions in life. That's what we kind of concentrate on the most.

**Q. To do it so quickly, you came in, you were hired for a reason, now suddenly you're in the semifinals. Saying that, then getting them to buy in, how challenging was that?**

DENNIS GATES: First, I don't look at things as challenges. I want to thank our president, Mun Choi; our athletic director, Desiree Reed-Francois; and our Board of Curators for believing in me to lead this program.

I thank our former players, former coaches. I thank the city of Columbia. Without them we would not be in the position we're in.

You say how fast. I say it took too long. I'm saying that respectfully because, in my eyes, we have the No. 1 team in the country. That's how I feel. I'm convicted of that. That's how I coach.

We talk about April 1st, April 3rd consistently in our program. We talk about Houston, Texas. We fell short of a goal, short. Although it's the fourth seed, we lost a goal, and we wanted to cut down nets, hold trophies, hang banners as the regular-season champs.

I credit Nate Oats and his program for their successes. It has taken too long for us to be able to do that, and I want it more. We weren't satisfied with our regular season at all.

I think leading with your heart and not your emotions is very important. You have to have transparency. You have to allow guys to look you in the eye and connect with you as a man and leader. At that point they adopt it.

I asked them to be the best versions of themselves every day. Some may dodge it. Some may try to get out the way of it. But my job is to do what my educators and coaches did for me: Hold up a mirror at all times without fatigue and let me see the best version of myself.

I do the same with my players.

**Q. First media timeout of the second half, you already had five fouls --**

DENNIS GATES: I needed that timeout.

**Q. What was the message to your team?**

DENNIS GATES: Stop fouling. I said, Stop fouling. Guys, do you want them to beat us on the free-throw line or beat us playing halfcourt and tough basketball plays?

We didn't want to just give them easy shots and baskets. But credit that team. I credit Rick Barnes. That's a great team. Hopefully a 2 seed team representing our conference. They have an unbelievable body of work. They will make a very difficult out in the NCAA tournament.

But I just wanted our guys to stay composed, make sure that they understood everything. The only thing that we did well tonight, one thing we did well tonight, was after timeout, we were able to execute offensively. Every time I called a timeout, our guys locked in and executed.

It was one time that I did not go into the huddle with a minute 30, 40 on the clock, when I ran to the baseline, called a timeout, they coached themselves in that moment. They came out and executed. By the time I got in the huddle, they executed the play.

I'm proud of that. I'm excited about what I see because I don't think we have played our very best yet this season. Hopefully you want to peak at the right time.

**Q. Can you talk about the first game against Alabama. Kobe didn't play. How do you think it could be different tomorrow?**

DENNIS GATES: Well, that's a great question. I appreciate that.

I don't really have an answer for you at that moment in time. I'm saying that respectfully. I have to watch the film. I have not focused on another opponent at all. We focus on the one that we have in front of us, and that's Tennessee.

But more important than Tennessee, the most important opponent is ourselves. I have done that consistently over my coaching career. I'm going to break down that game again because the season is so fluid, sometimes you can't debrief properly after in-conference games because you got to get ready and prepare for the next one.

With had a tough opponent after Alabama, the first game. We didn't dial in because we knew we only played them once. Tonight a sleepless night. I'll watch probably every game they played since the last game we played them, dial into all the notes that I have.

But we have a tough opponent. It's going to be a great atmosphere, semifinal game, in the best conference in the country.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

DENNIS GATES: MIZ.

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