

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 11, 2023

Missouri Tigers

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Dennis Gates

Noah Carter

D'Moi Hodge

Postgame Press Conference



Alabama 72, Missouri 61

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to continue on with Missouri. We'll ask Coach Gates for some general thoughts on the game, then take questions.

Coach Gates.

DENNIS GATES: Outstanding atmosphere. Great game. I'm proud of our group. They did a tremendous job following the game plan. Playing the No. 1 team in the country, the No. 1 No. 1 seed who I believe should be rewarded of that.

It was a game of runs. I thought the first half provided us an opportunity to sort of dive into our scouting report and execute some things. We missed eight straight field goals early. I thought that could have had the game go away from us.

Obviously how we ended the first half, I'm extremely proud of. We started that first half 6 for 25. Finished 6 of 8 from the field, which was outstanding.

But the end of the game I thought Alabama was able to get to their sweet spot, 6 of 7 from the three-point line. Made 13 of their final 18 baskets. They did a good job executing.

But I'm proud of our guys, proud of who we are, what we stand for. But more importantly what we were able to accomplish.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Other than Kobe being back, what was the difference in this game from the last time you played

Alabama?

D'MOI HODGE: I mean, I'll say the intensity, knowing the kind of team they are, what they were looking for. Knowing the scout, the game plan, I feel like we executed good, but tough shots late in the game. I feel that was the difference, just lock into the game plan and executing that.

NOAH CARTER: I agree. Just locking into the game plan, knowing tendencies, knowing everything. I think that's what it was.

Q. Can you take us through your thought process on the shot to end the first half. Did you think it had a shot of going in?

D'MOI HODGE: The play was to shoot the ball in the corner. I tried to get a shot off to do that, two seconds on the shot clock. I tried my best to make it.

Sean, he told me he was going to try regardless. So I just lock in and get the shot up. My team had confidence in me to knock that shot down. I'm happy they had the confidence in me to knock that shot down, yeah.

Q. You held Alabama 0 for 10 from the outside to start the game. Tell us about the defensive approach.

D'MOI HODGE: I would say knowing that's what they wanted, like threes and dunks, but every time we tried to get in, the catching is more difficult, instead of getting in rhythm shots. They got open wide looks, but in my opinion I feel like they rushed the open shots knowing we were trying to get them off the line.

Obviously they knocked down three in the first half. Second half that was the game plan to maybe rushing to their shots and not be comfortable.

Q. You're one of the two best offensive teams in this league. Alabama held you to 61. What did they do to frustrate you offensively?

NOAH CARTER: Yeah, I mean, they were very long, athletic. It's tough to penetrate their paint. So, I mean,



they're No. 1 for a reason. They're really good defensively, good offensively. I think that's just what was going on.

Q. Did you think you would make it to the semifinal point, new team?

D'MOI HODGE: I would say we definitely felt like we belonged there. We didn't come victorious in the semifinal, but we always felt like we was one of the best teams in the conference. We feel like we could have won the championship. We fell short.

We definitely knew we were going to make it this far and go on to the next one.

NOAH CARTER: Yeah, I mean, we knew for sure that we had confidence in ourselves to make it here. Our goal was to win the championship, so we did fall short. That was definitely our goal.

Q. Noah, tough buckets tonight. You've been playing well the last couple regular season games. What has been clicking for you recently?

NOAH CARTER: Just my confidence. Feel like I've been playing very confidently these last couple games to end the season. Just remaining confident. My teammates, they got a lot of confidence in me. Coach Gates has a lot of confidence in me.

Just continuing to play that way, going out there knowing that I can provide.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, we'll excuse the student-athletes, continue with questions for Coach Gates.

Q. What did Alabama do to limit Kobe Brown? With your team, the next step is going to the NCAA tournament, what are you most looking forward to with your group?

DENNIS GATES: I thought as it relates to Kobe Brown and tonight's game, I thought he wasn't able to get to the free-throw line. It was minimalized calls. Very physical game. Nothing where I would say was a disadvantage. I'm sure we fouled a lot. I'm sure they fouled a lot. To be able to come away with the free throw count, 8 for 8, then they were 8 for 11. Just wasn't a lot of shooting fouls called. I think that's a part of Kobe Brown, his game. That's a part of it.

He's a very tough, tough guard, a guy that can get multiple opportunities, whether it's behind the arc, in the paint, as well as the free-throw line. He wasn't able to do that tonight.

I just look at it as one that we got to do a better job. We didn't play well enough.

Q. Brandon Miller took over the game in the second half. What about his play can make him so hard to stop?

DENNIS GATES: Brandon Miller is a great player. I thought the first half we did a good job staying out of rotation, meaning we wasn't allowing ourselves to give up those threes. In the second half he was able to get the end of a rotation, meaning whether it was a two-pass rotation, three-pass rotation, and the reward was wide-open shots while we were scrambling.

His teammates did a great job finding him. They did a great job spacing. Ultimately I thought they did do a better job than us sustaining more runs, which he was a part of. Nothing that I didn't think they could do originally. I just thought we did a better job in the first half and the second.

At the 11:43 mark of the game in the second half, it got away from us a little bit where we couldn't hit a basket and they were able to.

Q. Do you think your team learned any lessons from this tournament that will be valuable in the NCAA tournament?

DENNIS GATES: There's always lessons. The best part about conference tournaments, no matter what schedule you have, your conference play is one thing, but playing Alabama at home, they're a different team than they were then. It's a great team.

They've developed, we've developed. But the atmosphere gives you a tournament feel. There's no better way than to play an NCAA No. 1 seed the week before the tournament. We provide ourselves with the lessons we have to come away with to get better.

I thought our guys did a good job. It was a game of runs. Opportunities slipped. I didn't think we managed the game as it relates to trying to get to that free-throw line when we were missing wide open three-pointers or wide-open rim shots. We just didn't execute.

Both teams played well today. Both teams played well. One team has to be on the other side of it. Credit Nate Oats and his team, they're heading onto the championship.

Q. How did the eight-man rotation impact your game plan?

DENNIS GATES: No impact at all. It's an advantage if you have to do that every other week or something like that. But consistently over a 30-plus game season, if you're playing in my system with only eight guys, yeah, maybe at that point.

At this time there's no such thing as depth. We have to play and go with the rhythm of your team, try your very best to manage the game, whether it's timeouts. Timeouts allowed us more rest than you probably imagined. That's why I took certain timeouts before the media, certain timeouts maybe after the media. It gave guys more rest time.

I don't think it impacted us today.

Q. NCAA seeding is out of your hands. Where do you feel you deserve to be?

DENNIS GATES: I hope we get in.

Q. Are you worried you wouldn't?

DENNIS GATES: I just hope we get in. That's my hope. I hope we get in. I don't know what the committee will do. It's going to be a lot of great teams not make the tournament. I hope we're able to get in. I hope we've done enough at the very beginning of the season. There were conversations about our scheduling and how all this didn't add up and all the matrix and everything else.

I've heard more negative about us than positive reinforcement throughout the year. I just hope we get in. It's a matchup game. We'll see. We'll see.

Q. What the tournament looks like nationally, doesn't seem to be a team like Gonzaga last couple years, the top seeds are going to have some questions. Does it look as wide open to a coach as it does from the outside?

DENNIS GATES: I think I look at it from a holistic standpoint. I always think it's wide open. That's just what it is. I think historically when you look at the history of teams being able to win the tournament, some may not have even won their conference tournament and been able to play in national championship games or move forward.

There's so many dynamics that takes place.

I do hope one thing: I hope our conference has eight or nine teams in the tournament. I do hope that. I think there are several teams that deserve to be in the tournament. You look at from top to bottom, there are bubble talks and all that. I'm not an expert at it. But I do know what I see

consistently. I said it before, we're the No. 1 conference in the country. When it comes down to coaches, players, we have several teams.

I would say nine teams that should make it. I hope. They're deserving. What Coach Stackhouse has done at Vanderbilt, he's one of the hottest teams in the country. I hope he's in the tournament. Chris Jans at Mississippi State, I hope he's in the tournament. They've been leading in analytical data for a long time throughout this season.

I hope Arkansas is in the tournament. They're deserving to be in the tournament. They have the talent. They have the pieces to make a run, in addition to those that have been significantly measured by, yes, these are tournament teams.

I hope Alabama gets the No. 1 seed. I hope Tennessee gets the No. 2 seed. I hope several things happen. Kentucky. Who am I missing? Guys, help me out. Texas A&M. C'mon, now, they shouldn't be nothing less. They held the No. 2 spot in our conference regular season for a long time. I think they're deserving of a No. 2 or 3 seed. There is no doubt about it.

I don't understand why they would not even be ranked a certain way throughout the season. I think we have had unbelievable coaching, unbelievable playing, unbelievable analytics that supports our style of play.

I want everybody to win in our conference except when they play us. Outside of that, I'm a champion of the SEC. I love this conference. I love what our conference stands for. I love the level of competition that's in it. There is no doubt in my mind - I'll say it again - we should have nine teams in there. I hope we do.

Q. There was a moment in the second half where Mohamed Diarra came out of the game looking frustrated. You put your hands in his face, held his head. What were you telling him?

DENNIS GATES: Just keep playing with confidence, have fun doing it. I made him smile. I wanted him to relax a little bit. I thought he had some open looks. I don't look the at it as frustration. He just wants to be perfect. Sometimes when you have young people wanting to be perfect, they miss out on the opportunities.

I don't want him to ever measure himself based of how many 'points I have'. I want him to measure himself off the whole game, how he's impacting defensively, making the extra pass, how he's impacting rebounding, even the personality of our team.

You just got to manage young people who want to be perfect, especially on this stage. His mom and family was watching the game back home. It was an early game here, but it was early there, as well, compared to 3, 4, 5 in the morning where she's usually watching, his brothers are usually watching.

I know he had a conversation. He just wanting to play well and represent his family, our institution and his teammates well. He don't want to let anyone down.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks.

DENNIS GATES: Thank you. MIZ.

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