

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 12, 2023

Alabama Crimson Tide

Tampa, Florida, USA

Amalie Arena

Coach Nate Oats

Brandon Miller

Jahvon Quinerly

Postgame Press Conference



Alabama 82, Texas A&M 63

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to continue with Alabama. We'll ask Coach Oats for some general comments on the game.

Coach.

NATE OATS: It was a hard-fought contest. Hard to open the thing up. I mean, they're a tough, great team. We just lost to them eight days ago.

We challenged our guards, we had to do better. Last time we played 'em, their starting backcourt with Taylor and Radford and Dennis were all in double figures. Taylor and Radford were over 20, Taylor had 28. The rest of the team, only three other guys scored. They were one point, two points, four points.

We really challenged our guards, we had to do better. I thought we did a great job on some of the opposing team's best players in this tournament. Kobe Brown was First Team All-SEC, scored six on us yesterday. Wade Taylor, First Team All-SEC, didn't make his first field goal until nine minutes in the second half.

I think Quinerly did an unbelievable job on Taylor today.

Proud of our defense. Thought we did a good job taking care of the ball. A lot better this game. We said offensively we're going to have to take care of the ball. We had 16 assists, only 12 turnovers for the tournament. We had 55 assists, that's almost 20 a game. I thought our guys did a great job sharing the ball, moving the ball.

I told them just keep taking shots. We didn't shoot it great

today, but 33% wasn't bad. I thought we were able to get the type of shots we wanted. We took 36 threes, 22 at-the-rim shots. Only got five non-rim twos, as opposed to us forcing them into taking 26 non-rim twos.

So kind our defensive philosophy, how we want to work. Field goal percentage pretty good. I thought this is the best game Charles played since he's been in an Alabama uniform.

Charles came out, impacted the game. We were plus 33 when Charles was in the game. 13 rebounds, 12 points, five blocks. Affected a lot of shots where he didn't get blocks. Really happy with that.

Obviously Quinerly stepped up huge both times we have been here in Nashville. If we had an NBA team, I would tell him to try to get on the NBA team. 6-0 in Nashville. He shows up big every time he comes here.

Nice it's Brandon's home city. Tournament MVP when he's in front of a lot of friends and family back here at home. Ecstatic for our guys. They're a great group of kids that bonded, played together. We had some goals at the beginning of the year, regular season championship was one of them. We got that. Tournament championship was one. They came out ready to play today.

Couldn't be happier for them. Bus ride home from Nashville will be a lot more fun now that we got a win. We're going to stick around here and watch Selection Sunday to see what our matchups will be.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Jahvon, having won two championships year, how does this compare to two years ago?

JAHVON QUINERLY: Definitely a little bit different. There were some fans at the first one, but not as many as this time.

Just to have our families here, be able to embrace them after the game, it's an unbelievable feeling.



Q. Brandon, talk about having to play with three fouls, kind of adjusting. JQ, one of the mantras you had two years ago was: We ain't done. Talk about what's still ahead for this team.

BRANDON MILLER: We noticed that we prepared knowing they would be a charge team, they slide up and take a lot of charges. Kind of got out and got two early. Had to lean on my teammates. Feel like they did a good job of pushing me through all the whole game.

JAHVON QUINERLY: Can you repeat that question for me, please?

Q. Two years ago you said we are not done. No. 1 overall seed probably. Talk about what's ahead still for this team.

JAHVON QUINERLY: Like Coach said, we set goals over the summer. Regular season tournament, obviously a national championship. It's March. Any team can win on any given day.

I'm going to make sure our guys are ready to go no matter who we match up with.

Q. Brandon, Coach Oats mentioned in his opening you're back in your hometown, win the MVP. What does that mean to you?

BRANDON MILLER: It means a lot. Have my family come five minutes down the road to watch me play. I've seen friends. My high school coach was here. That's probably the best thing.

The funnest part is coming out here, getting the win with my guys in the SEC championship.

Q. Jahvon, Coach said he challenged the guards on defense. What changed from the first matchup with them and this one? What was different about the defensive intensity?

JAHVON QUINERLY: We only seen Texas A&M one time before this game. I think we kind of not underestimated them, but we didn't come out with the right energy against their guards in particular.

Today I just wanted to make sure Wade didn't do what he's been doing all weekend. That was just a big emphasis from Coach, to stop Radford and Wade. It benefited us in the end.

Q. What was the big key for this team this year? I

wanted to ask about Noah Gurley. Defensively, he was a real key early along with Chuck.

BRANDON MILLER: He's one of our older veteran leaders. I feel like he knows everyone's struggles and everyone's strengths. I feel like him not playing behind me, he's always ready. I mean, he gives me the courage to be the guy who I am today.

JAHVON QUINERLY: No, Noah is the ultimate teammate. It's not easy for a guy who's won at Furman and started last year for us to get DNPs. He's always just ready.

That's my roommate. That's one of my best friends, to be honest with you. Just his mindset, the way he approaches the game, even not knowing if he's going to play, it's crazy.

I'm so happy for him.

Q. Jahvon, you swept the SEC twice during your time at Alabama. What does this program, team mean to you?

JAHVON QUINERLY: Alabama is my second home. It was good to do it one time, but this one right here, this one's very special, considering everything that's gone on this year. Just the group that we have, young freshmen who's come in and who's willing to listen, listen to coach, listen to some of the older veterans with open ears. It's a very special feeling.

I feel like Alabama's really put itself on the radar basketball-wise.

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

Q. You mentioned yesterday up until today you were 0-3 against Buzz Williams and Texas A&M. What did it mean to get the first win today and your second SEC championship?

NATE OATS: I mean, look, Buzz does an unbelievable job. You look at how he's turned that program around. It's not necessarily special to get against them, we're just 0-3 against them since I got here. Haven't played that many games. It's the only school since I got here that we have a losing record against.

We made sure we really prepared for this. I thought our coaches did a really good job on both sides of the ball. We didn't do a great job preparing our guys for the game at their place last week I didn't think.

It's a lot more special to win the SEC. The SEC's a really

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good basketball league. Got some really good basketball programs in this league. I mean, obviously Kentucky's Kentucky, everybody knows. You kind of go down the list. Auburn has been to a Final Four. It's our rival school. Arkansas, got great talent.

You look at the four teams that were in this semifinals, Missouri, Coach Gates has done a great job. Stackhouse has done an unbelievable job.

To beat the teams we had to beat to get here was not easy. So proud of the guys, proud of their effort, proud they were able to get really focused. Got a lot of mental toughness.

To sweep it regular season and tournament twice in three years, with a totally different team, Quinerly is a big part of both, speaks to the level of players who have been able to get in here. You can't win these games without players. We're fortunate to have the best player on the floor this year every time we walked out with Brandon.

Quinerly has been unbelievable for us. Seems like he shows up in March. We have the March version of Quinerly for sure. Happy for the team but particularly those two.

Q. How is this year different as tournament champs moving ahead to the NCAA tournament compared to a couple years ago?

NATE OATS: You know what, I think we were No. 1 for a week. We might quite possibly be a No. 1 overall seed. We were a 2 seed before. We got to the Sweet 16. The second weekend of the tournament's not easy to do. We didn't make free throws against UCLA, went to overtime, we lost.

This group's different. They're both really special in my eyes. That group was a group that decided to buy into the new staff, us playing, recruited by a previous staff. Without that group, we're not where we're at. We were able to turn the whole narrative of Alabama basketball back in a great direction.

Now we've got a new group. Quinerly is still here obviously. A lot of new guys. Roster was recruited entirely by our staff. Different. They all came here to play a certain style.

I think we're proving you can play fast, you can play a modern style in college, up-tempo, shooting a lot of threes. As long as your defense is where it needs to be, you can win.

Very distinctly different groups. I like this group. I think we're third in the country in defense, just like the group two years ago. We have a little bit more offensive firepower, a little bit more versatility, a little more depth. We don't have Herb Jones on defense, but we got Charles. We have better rim protection.

I think you saw how good we can be on defense when everybody's locked in. Similar in a lot of ways, but definitely different groups. Love each of 'em. Excited to see what we can do with this group in the NCAA tournament.

Q. Regarding the defense, can you explain what Charles means to that unit, how he plays such a crucial role?

NATE OATS: With the way we've designed our defense, Charlie, Henry, my assistant that runs the defense, came from the NBA. We're third in the country in defensive efficiency two years ago without a rim protector like him. We did it differently that year.

This year with Charles at the rim, we're trying to send everything -- run them off the three-point line and run him downhill to the rim.

Charles anchors the defense when he's in. He affects a lot of shots. I'm looking, they shot 16 threes. They shot 26 non-rim twos. They were 3 for 26 on non-rim twos, 5 of 16 from three. They shot under 30% from the floor. A lot of that is due to Charles.

Obviously our guards have to do a good job sending the ball down into the lane. Those guards from Texas A&M, most guards didn't want to go into the rim against Charles, so they take a lot of non-rim twos. 3 of 26 they were today. That's 11%. Great defense for us when you can force midrange twos.

If you don't have Charles at the rim to block 'em, those end up being more at the rims. Your at the rim percentage is going to be a lot higher. They finished 46% on the active rims; they didn't get nearly as many of them. They only got 24 of those.

Without Charles anchoring it, it's not going to be what it is. We have a lot of other guys that are good on defense, too. Pringle is getting better. Backup center. Backs up Clowney. Neither of those are quite Charles, but they're both getting better in their own right.

Q. You're firmly in the mix for the No. 1 overall seed. Why do you think you're deserving of that?

NATE OATS: I don't get into all that. We play the games in our schedule. You cover us a lot. You know how we like to schedule. If you don't play the best, I don't think you can be the best.

We went on the road to Houston, won at Houston. They're going to be a 1 seed, too. I'm not sure who the other 1 seeds will be. If you look at our résumé, it's pretty strong. That can make us the No. 1 overall if they choose to. If you're comparing two teams, one of them won on the road at the other one, it comes down to those two, it probably makes it a little easier because we were able to play 'em.

Houston's an unbelievable team, too. They got a great résumé. I'm not sure who's in the conversation. I think Kansas lost in the Big 12 tournament. They're really good. Got a really strong résumé, I've seen. Just have to see how much they value conference tournaments and the level of play in the conference tournament.

I mean, the SEC is one of the best leagues in the country, won the regular season and conference tournament both. We won on the road at Houston. The Carolina win doesn't look as good now. They were No. 1 in the country when we beat 'em. I thought we played pretty well up there. We beat Michigan State. At the time they were a little better. They're still a really good program.

I think we did a good job in the non-conference. That's the thing with us, too, we're going to help our league out by how we schedule the non-conference. When we win those big games, it helps the league out. We get in the league, we're going to do a little bit better.

We're going to continue to schedule that way. I think it's paid off every year we've been here. Hopefully it will pay off again this year.

Q. All things considered, how has this team been built to win the national championship? What are the three keys?

NATE OATS: I think we've got a really good chance to win it. If you're going to give me three keys, I'm going to go back to what has kind of bothered us a little bit this year. Turnovers. If we can consistently take care of the ball, not turn it over where we get shots up, that's number one.

Number two is just our defensive intensity. I think you saw it today. It was a lot different than it's been. Our Texas A&M game in College Station, then look at what it was today. Quinerly's intensity. It's not a specific thing, but how hard do we want to play on D? When our defensive intensity is up, locked into a scouting report like we were today, we're one of the best defenses and teams in the

country.

The last thing I'd say is can we generate enough we call margin plays? Can we win the second chance? Today I'm looking at second-chance points. We won it 14-11. Can we win the free throw deal? We didn't today. They were 20 of 24, we were 16 of 22. Can we win the transition points. We call them margin plays. We were 17-8 today.

Can we win the margin games? Can we take care of the ball, come with a defensive intensity? If we can do that, we're going to be playing hopefully three weeks from tomorrow and having a chance to do that.

It's not easy. You got to do it six games in a row.

What I won't say is we've got to shoot it well. We've tried to build a team that can still win when we don't shoot it well. Can we be great on defense, rebound the ball well, take care of the ball. If we do that, even if we shoot it poorly, I think we can generate enough free throws, rim shots to win. I think we've got a chance to win the whole thing, like you said.

Q. You're in a very unprecedented situation here. You have a team that's one of the favorites. There's going to be a lot of attention on you with this murder case that's ongoing. As the tournament is going to start in a couple days, what is your message going to be to the team about all of this?

NATE OATS: Obviously we never lose sight of the tragedy that's kind of marked our season. It's always there.

Today, with the team, we're going to celebrate this win without losing sight of that. Moving forward, we're going to try to keep the team focused on the task at hand, just like we have, without ever losing sight of the fact it's an unbelievably sad situation.

Our guys have been able to do a pretty good job of that, I think. Love to celebrate today what we were able to accomplish together as a team, so...

Q. You were able to out-rebound the Aggies by 13. How big of an emphasis was that?

NATE OATS: Huge point of emphasis. Coach Hodgson coaches our bigs. He was all over 'em. Charles I believe had seven boards in the first half. He came out ready to play. I thought he dominated the game on the interior.

I challenged Clowney at halftime. He was a zero, zero points, rebounds, blue-collar points. He was in foul trouble obviously. But he played eight minutes.



I said, Look, we need you to step up if we're going to win this game. He stepped up in the second half. He had 11 rebounds. To go from zero to 11 in 12 minutes in the second half, 11 rebounds in 12 minutes, he stepped up. Clowney has been huge for what we've been able to do.

We had three guys in double-figure rebounds, Clowney, Miller, Bediako. Based on our starting front court, it was big.

Second-chance points, they need those to win those. They need points off turnovers, need to turn people over, second-chance points, margin plays. They were great at it all year.

To rebound a team that tough and physical, they really hang their hat on that type of stuff. To out-rebound them by 13 was huge.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

NATE OATS: Appreciate it, guys.

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