

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

## Arkansas Razorbacks

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

## Coach Eric Musselman

## Tramon Mark

## Trevon Brazile

### Postgame Press Conference



Arkansas 90, Vanderbilt 85, OT

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to begin Arkansas.

We'll ask Coach for some general thoughts on the game, then take questions for the student-athletes, finish up with Coach.

Coach, would you begin.

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Yeah, just a tale of two halves. I thought first half offensively, defensively, we did not play up to the way we've played over the last couple weeks.

Halftime was good for us. I thought the team regrouped.

I thought second half was the exact opposite of what we saw in the first half. Much better offense, much better defense. Played with more intensity.

Give Vandy credit for that comeback under a minute and a half to go. I thought our guys closed the game, played fairly good defense in the last five minutes, certainly scored enough points to win the game.

Give our guys a lot of credit for regrouping after halftime and the way we played the first 20 minutes of the game.

THE MODERATOR: Let's take questions for the two student-athletes.

**Q. For both guys. K.B. really took over in overtime, got seven. What did you think of how he played, especially in the overtime?**

TRAMON MARK: He did what he does. He got to the

rack. He played aggressive. Got to the free-throw line. Made plays. It was good for us down the stretch.

TREVON BRAZILE: He did what we needed him to do. We know he can get downhill. He's great at drawing free throw attempts. Him doing that in overtime really helped us.

**Q. Eric alluded to the second half. You were down by 15, dug a pretty big hole. How good does it feel to finish off the comeback? The overtime, they seemed to have the momentum, but you took over. What was the key to the comeback and then regrouping in overtime?**

TRAMON MARK: It was good for us, just us coming back playing hard. I think that's what started us off, playing hard, us being connected on defense and offense. It was good for us. Able to let us survive another day.

TREVON BRAZILE: Obviously we didn't play up to our standards in the first half. To be able to regroup and survive, nobody wanted to go home, so... It was a good turnout.

**Q. Tramon, what is the key to getting you into an offensive groove like what you had in the second half?**

TRAMON MARK: I just went out and said I'm going to leave it all out on the floor. It worked for my favor coming out in that second half. 18 second half points. My teammates was with me. Everybody was rolling the second half. That was good for us.

**Q. It's a tall ask to win five in five days. How do you feel about surviving, you get to play again tomorrow?**

TRAMON MARK: I just feels good to be able to play another game with the guys. Going back to the hotel, watching film. We're going to do a walk-through. All those little things that make a great team. Happy we get to do that again.

**Q. How good does it feel to survive an overtime game and move on?**



TREVON BRAZILE: Coming in, it was a theme all week that we were bringing it down and staying five, for five games. When we got here, we started bringing it out with one. Just taking it one game at a time. Tonight was a good start.

**Q. You guys got to play South Carolina tomorrow. It's a shot for payback. How do you feel about tomorrow?**

TRAMON MARK: It feels good. We got to get a redemption game against them. We're going to come out way better than we did in the first half and second half. It's going to be a game tomorrow, for sure.

TREVON BRAZILE: He pretty much answered it.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse the players and continue with questions for Coach.

**Q. There are a lot of examples of a team surviving in a game like that and picking up momentum. A lot of people that think your team is talented enough to make a deep run. Talk about the mindset and what winning a game like that can do for the future of the tournament.**

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Well, I think, one, when you're playing like we did in the first half, it's hard to turn the thing around. But I thought we played a great second half. We changed up our defense. We started trapping. What we call our hits... We have not really done it this year because we haven't been very good at it, quite frankly. Our past teams have done it and done it really, really well.

I thought that that disrupted Vanderbilt in a major way. We just picked the players that we wanted to leave and try to force an open man to make a play.

Our game plan coming in was we didn't want Lawrence to go off and have a big game. I thought our team did a really good job on him, especially keeping him off the foul line. 14 free throw attempted in Bud Walton. Tonight three free throws attempted. We know that Manjon went off, had a great game. But again, we felt like that wing scorer was something that we could ill afford tonight, and I thought we did a really good job of help defense on No. 0, Lawrence.

**Q. When it got to overtime, was it get it out of Manjon's hands?**

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Yeah, I mean, even to start the second half, I mean, we pressed a couple possessions 'cause I just thought we lacked juice. I thought maybe by pressing, it might ignite us a little bit. That's what

happened when we played them in Bud Walton.

Vanderbilt executes their offense really well. Tempo can be something that you're concerned with. I just thought we played with a lot more competitive spirit the last 20 minutes, and certainly in overtime. We wanted to try to make somebody else beat us, so...

**Q. Battle had seven points in overtime, really got downhill. What did you think of his performance in overtime?**

ERIC MUSSELMAN: It was phenomenal. We wanted to go to him. We've gone to him the last couple weeks when we need a basket. We put the ball in T. Mark's hands, too, at certain stretches. I thought Makhi Mitchell was phenomenal in middle pick and roll, rolling to the rim, rolling behind their five-man.

Again, I thought offensively, when you think about the way we played offensively in the second half, it was the pace we wanted. We made some threes. I thought in the first half they kept that lane pretty compact and didn't allow us to get as many free throws attempted as we wanted. Didn't allow us to get dribble drives.

I think teams that do that over 40 minutes, of late, we've proven that we can make enough threes. Nine threes tonight is a really good number for us.

**Q. You alluded to the defense in the second half, extending that pressure. You're playing a team tomorrow that plays the slowest pace in the conference. How does that defense, when you extend it past halfcourt, do its job of getting the other team to be able to play in a pace maybe they're not comfortable with?**

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Yeah, I mean, I just think you have some decisions to make on what type of pressure, what type of press you want to do. We haven't done it much this year. How the game unfolds tomorrow, I really don't know. Obviously none of us know.

We had guys play extended minutes, obviously. So we'll dive into the film tonight and see. We don't have a long time to do a prep. Obviously we won't have a shootaround tomorrow. They will not be on their legs in the gym anywhere to walk through.

It's going to have to be a solid walk-through in a ballroom, like an NBA team might do on back-to-back nights.

We have to get ready. We've done a good job preparing for teams when we play them a second or third time.

Hopefully we come up with something slightly different than what happened at Bud Walton. If we did what we do in Bud Walton, we will not win the game. Pretty simple.

**Q. Given the offensive might in this conference from team after team, how hard is it just to win a game? What goes into that?**

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Yeah, this conference is unbelievable. It really is. The new players that have come into this league, whether they be freshmen from Kentucky, whether it be Hubbard at Mississippi State, whether it's transfers that have come into the league like Knecht. There's a lot of new players in this league that have surpassed some guys that are returners, quite frankly.

That shows me how much this league has improved across the board. The coaching in this league is off the charts. There's better coaches in this league than anywhere in the country. There's more talent, more NBA Draft picks. There's been more NBA Draft picks.

Really hard to win in this league if you don't have pros. I know it's a football conference, but it's also a freaking basketball conference, I can tell you that. Baseball. Keep going... Gymnastics.

But basketball is right up there with football and everybody else as far as where we rank nationally.

**Q. I assume, barring some crazy scenario, you're going to play South Carolina tomorrow. What do you remember about the fact that you get to move on and the rematch?**

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Two different situations. You're speaking of the COVID, when it was shut down. That was our first year at Arkansas. Awesome team to coach. I didn't recruit really many of those guys. Having to tell them we weren't going to play after winning Game 1, that team thought they were a couple wins away from making the NCAA tournament. The thing gets shut down.

That's probably the hardest thing I've ever had to do with a group ever young men that I had really only been around for eight months. The whole room was new to one another. They fought and scrapped. They had a 6'6" center. We were undersized. If I had to label them, they were heart and hustle. Nobody wanted to play 'em. We got out-rebounded every night, but led the nation in defending the three, because that was our only way of survival.

This is a completely different situation, different coaching staff at South Carolina, different personnel for both teams.

We're just happy that we're still playing. Again, at halftime I don't know if many Razorback fans thought we were still going to be playing. Here we are. We got a short turnaround. We have to get ready for South Carolina, which is a top team in the country, a well-coached team, and a team that's got great talent.

THE MODERATOR: We'll call it right there. Coach, thank you.

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Thank you.

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