

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 14, 2024

## Ole Miss Rebels

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

## Coach Chris Beard

## Jaemyn Brakefield

## Jamarion Sharp

Postgame Press Conference



Texas A&M 80, Ole Miss 71

THE MODERATOR: We'll ask Coach Beard for some general thoughts on the game, then take questions.

CHRIS BEARD: Always wonder what Buzz is doing during the games (smiling).

In terms of the basketball game, tell you what we told our team a few minutes ago. Much better effort than we had the other day in Oxford. We played Texas A&M three times this year, beat them in College Station. Just did not play well at all in Oxford. Not taking anything away from their effort the other day. They played well.

I thought tonight was one of those games where I thought we ran out of time. Got it back to one possession with two minutes left, then couldn't get the stop. So now you got to score the next time down. Now it becomes a fouling game, pressing game, hoping for a missed free throw. We didn't have any fortune there.

Thought our guys played really hard tonight and well in a lot of ways. Obviously rebounding was a challenge for us all season. Our season kind of ended on a note where, once again, that was a weakness of our team. We'll have to do a better job coaching that and teaching and ultimately recruit better to it, as well.

Free-throw line wasn't great to us tonight. I thought rebounding was the difference in a hard-fought game. I was proud of our effort, especially considering Saturday was kind of a different type game. Guys did a good job responding and ready to play tonight.

That's kind of the thoughts on the basketball game.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for either of the student-athletes.

**Q. Jaemyn, what are you going to remember the most about this year's team and journey?**

JAEMYN BRAKEFIELD: I mean, I love this group. Obviously I had a chance to have my hand in the recruiting, which I love. I mean, it's been a great group of guys that's been around me.

I'm just going to remember them for the journey that we had on and off the court, for sure.

**Q. Coach talked about how they out-rebounded you. Was that due to their physicality? What could you have done better?**

JAEMYN BRAKEFIELD: Obviously we had a game plan, and just not following that down the stretch really hurt us. What we shot from the free-throw line tonight really hurt us.

JAMARION SHARP: Just like he said, it was mostly rebounding. One of our downfalls was boxing out. We've been trying to work on it. Obviously we didn't come through with it tonight. I think that was a big part of it.

THE MODERATOR: Fellas, we'll excuse you. We'll continue with Coach Beard.

**Q. Talk bigger picture a little bit. Not the outcome that you wanted, but overall Ole Miss athletics is in a great position, and you're adding to that with the excitement around basketball. Portal opens up on Monday. Are you going to be participating in NIT or any post-season tournament? What does the future look like for Ole Miss basketball?**

CHRIS BEARD: Portal is open now. A lot of players already in it. With the coaches changes and all, guys get fired, guys change job, a lot of players are already in it. Believe Monday is the date it opens up to the next level of players.



Your question about the athletic department, can't agree more. It's just an exciting time to be at Ole Miss. I've been fortunate in my career, I've been at a lot of great institutions, have enjoyed other people's success.

But this is different. What Lane is doing with football, it's just exciting for everybody. Coach Yo, women's basketball. Looking forward to watching their run this month. Of course baseball, one of the top teams in the country. Won the national championship a couple years ago. Olympic sports.

There's a lot of momentum on campus. Those things don't happen by accident. It always starts with your leaders. We have a special chancellor, Chancellor Boyce. He's a leader. He values the student-athletes. Of course Keith Carter, athletic director, is special. Just cool working with and for Keith because he played this game at a high level.

Great administration. In today's world, the name, image and likeness, really enjoy and appreciate the Growth Collective puts into Ole Miss, the alumni, donors. I agree, it's a really exciting time right now. A lot of momentum.

Simply stated, what we're trying to do with men's basketball is to do our part. I think this year there will be other times to talk about that. Obviously kind of emotional about the game today.

But we had some success this year. Attendance, student section. Proud that two guys will graduate this spring. A couple other guys will complete some graduate work.

I think we laid the foundation. Is the culture completely built yet? I would say no, but it's going in that direction. Just got to get to the point where we build it and start defending it.

Lots of positives this year. To be ranked in the top 25 several weeks in the poll, to beat some really good teams along the way that we'll be playing in March Madness, to establish a home-court advantage. Just a lot of things in Oxford that I'm really proud of.

Ultimately there's a scoreboard. We came to Ole Miss to win tournaments like this and to play beginning next weekend. We'll just keep working towards that.

It's a process. As much as we'd all like it to happen overnight, sometimes it happens a little bit quicker than others. But I think we're going in the right direction.

I have a lot of confidence in our staff and our players and our administration and really our fan base. One of the coolest places I've ever coached. There's a spirit around

Ole Miss, Oxford, the state of Mississippi. It's a really cool place to coach.

**Q. If you received an NIT bid, would you accept it?**

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, guys, right now I'm just thinking about that last blackout where we cut it to three points and Radford got fouled. I think there will be a different time, sooner than later, to talk about that. Just not in a position to really think about that right now.

**Q. Buzz went on a rant there before you came in about the block charge, how it's affected being able to defend, scoring. As a defensively minded coach, how do you think it has affected college basketball this year? Is it a good thing, a bad thing, something you have to get used to and figure out?**

CHRIS BEARD: I always enjoy Buzz. Buzz got podcasts, all sorts of stuff going on. I didn't hear what he was saying.

But college basketball changed this year with the block charge. I think everybody in our game - officials, coaches, players - are trying to kind of figure it out. There were some frustrating moments this season with that.

Again, it's a new rule. We'll just continue to adjust to it.

**Q. You mentioned Mississippi, in particular it being a special place. We're seeing success all across the board in basketball, Mississippi State, Southern Miss. What makes the state so special? When you're sitting in the recruiting rooms, the in-state talent, what do you tell them to come to play at the University of Mississippi?**

CHRIS BEARD: Got really good coaches and players in the state right now. Jay is a friend of mine. Jan is a friend of mine. Really good at what they do. We played both of those teams this year. Really good players in the state, as well. You think about all three teams, have all-conference type players in the two different leagues. There's also some other really good basketball, not just the three schools you mentioned. I'd start with that.

What I've been really impressed with in my short time in Mississippi so far is the fan bases. There's a lot of people that care. You go down to the gas station and fill up. If there's a Mississippi State guy around, you'll know it. An Ole Miss fan or Southern Miss fan, you'll know it, too.

A lot of passionate people in the state of Mississippi. All the programs are really well-coached right now. Good players. Really good high school coaches in our state. There's good grassroots basketball. There's a lot of

tradition.

In a lot of ways there's a lot of sneaky history in the state of Mississippi. Junior college basketball in the state is the best in the country. I don't know, just a lot of opportunity for success in the state of Mississippi with our sport, basketball.

**Q. We were just talking about the portal. Obviously you've had this year under your belt. How have you been able to assess what you think you'll need for next season based on what you saw this year?**

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, I think that's the same every year. You kind of evaluate as the season goes on. Certainly take some notes here and there that you're going to go right back to when the season is over.

Obviously our staff learned a lot about the SEC, about these players. Many of them we met in June. Some of them we didn't meet until September. First year is always really challenging.

Where my heart and mind is is just appreciation. I really appreciate the guys that played for Kermit and trusted us to come back to Ole Miss. I appreciate all the players that trusted our program with one year of eligibility left or maybe a couple. I really appreciate our fan base, our students.

We really wanted to win today to just coach these guys another day. Everybody's season ends up into a game like this. I've coached on that final Monday night of the season. I've coached on the Thursday before, been blessed. Doesn't really matter where it ends. Only one team has the confetti coming down on them.

This year it ends a lot sooner than any of us would want it to end, period. We had high expectations for this group. I'll never apologize for that. I think it's the biggest gift you can give someone is expectation.

We'll just continue to chip away, recruit players that want to be coached, win, go to Ole Miss, go to class every day, or every other day some days.

The season is a journey. A lot of emotion at the end. I look at my two daughters, the same look on their faces when we lost Monday night. Doesn't really matter when you get kicked out of the party, when it ends, it stings a little bit.

I do have a lot of positive thoughts in my mind. I was really proud of the team today. We got kicked by Texas A&M just a few days ago, and we did a lot of soul searching. We had some good practices, preparation.

I think today was one of those games where we ran out of time. I don't think we got beat today. We ran out of time. We could have used a couple more minutes there down the stretch.

I was proud of our effort today. Obviously the rebounding is what it is. That's not just the players, that's coaching as well. We have to do a better job of that, and we will.

THE MODERATOR: We have time for one more question.

CHRIS BEARD: Does the loser get like eight minutes and the winner gets 45?

**Q. How do you look at the roster in terms of the one you're leaving now?**

CHRIS BEARD: In terms of the players or the style...

**Q. Players.**

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, drastically different. I don't think there's any coach in the country that would tell you different. You can get four or five guys to return, that's going to be a huge advantage in college basketball now.

The game has changed. One thing we've always done is done a pretty good job of adapting, thinking ahead, play offense, not defense. We don't make the rules, but you can sit around and complain about 'em or you can figure out how to win within the system. That's exactly what we're going to do.

Our coaching staff is already talking about recruiting five minutes after the SEC tournament ends for us. Yeah, our roster will look different. I'm not sure that any coach could sit up here after the season and say, Hey, we got everybody coming back, we're going to roll it back. That would be a special team if that happens.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

CHRIS BEARD: Thank you. Appreciate you guys that follow us locally this season. Look forward to seeing you back in Oxford.

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