

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

**Ole Miss Rebels**

**Coach Chris Beard**

**Sean Pedulla**

**Malik Dia**

Postgame Press Conference



**Q. Malik, they struggled to keep you off the glass. What have you liked about the matchup that you've had?**

CHRIS BEARD: Long question (smiling).

MALIK DIA: It's March. We got to show up and bring our best effort. It's not really about the matchup. I think it's more about the team, just figuring out what's going on offensively and defensively.

Just being in attack mode and being aggressive.

**Q. Sean, you missed your first six threes. What was going through your mind on that shot?**

SEAN PEDULLA: Yeah, shooters keep shooting I guess is the mindset. At that point in the game, it's March, you got to make a play. My mindset was just get off the best shot possible. Transition three. Felt like nobody picked me up. They did a little bit far back. At that point I was teeing up a good shot and fortunately it dropped.

**Q. Sean, was it frustration? Before you hit that shot, how were you feeling? Were you hesitant on the three?**

SEAN PEDULLA: Yeah, I mean, I wouldn't say I was hesitant just because I've shot that shot countless times in my life. I put the work in basically. So even though I was 0-6, I'm a confident player, I shoot confidently. That was what was required tonight.

Again, just fortunate the last one dropped.

**Q. Did you know you were 0-6?**

SEAN PEDULLA: Yeah (smiling).

**Q. Y'all lost to Auburn twice. Got beat pretty bad the last time. How exciting is it to get another shot?**

MALIK DIA: Yeah, I'm super excited. Really want another crack at 'em. I think we've got the team to beat them.

Ole Miss 83, Arkansas 80

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to begin with Ole Miss. We'll ask Coach Beard for some general thoughts on the game, then take questions.

CHRIS BEARD: Good March college basketball game. Had to be great for the fans on both sides. A lot of respect for the opponent. Hall of Fame coach. Seven-man rotation right now. In my opinion, told the guys this last night, I think all seven are either draft picks or guys that have a chance to be NBA players in the future.

We consider this a great win, maybe one of the best of the season. Arkansas had won five of their last six or six of their last seven. To me it was maybe kind of a second weekend-type game. A talented team.

I think both teams played really well in segments of the game. There were portions in the first half, in the middle of the second half where Ole Miss was playing about as well as we could play. Arkansas, the same. There were portions, especially in the second half, where they were on full cylinders.

We wish those guys the best of luck in the NCAA tournament. A lot of respect for Coach Cal. A really good win if our team.

I don't view this as the first game in Nashville. I view this as we competed with a team that has second-weekend NCAA tournament written all over 'em.

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



We've been preparing. I think right now we're playing really good March basketball. Our coach is strong. Super excited. It's going to be a big challenge, but I'm ready.

SEAN PEDULLA: Anytime you get a chance to play one of the top teams in the country, it's a good opportunity, a good chance to kind of test yourselves, see where you're at, especially heading into March.

They've beaten us twice. I think we come out best effort, fix the things we've been messing up on practice, I think it will be good.

**Q. From a player's perspective, what has it been like going through this grind this year with this SEC?**

SEAN PEDULLA: I feel like it's been really fun more so than anything. This is my first year in the SEC. That is what I'm used to as far as what the SEC is like.

I think it's really fun. Every single game you're playing a tournament team if not a top 15, 10, 5 ranked team. The competition is insane. For me, it's just fun to play good basketball day in, day out.

MALIK DIA: Super fun. It's a blessing. I look at it as not a lot of people have the opportunity to do this, especially at this time. The SEC probably being the best conference in the history this year. It's just such a blessing and so much fun to play each and every game, like he said, playing against really good competition.

I think it's just going to make us stronger for March playing against quality opponents each and every game. It's something different.

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

**Q. What are your thoughts on facing Auburn for a third time this season after what happened in the previous two meetings?**

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, opportunity. One of if not the best team in college basketball. It's a 40-minute game, so... It's not going to be the better team, it's going to be the better team that played those 40 minutes.

I think we would all agree that Auburn is one of the best teams in the country. I think we'd all agree it's a great challenge for us. But it's a 40-minute game. That's what makes March special.

We don't have to be better than Auburn, we just got to be better than Auburn for 40 minutes.

**Q. You referenced a game like today followed by a game like tomorrow, it's not a carbon copy of next week, but does this prepare you for what you will face next week?**

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, I think so, every step of the way. Just like non-conference games, Louisville, Purdue, BYU, Colorado State. These are NCAA tournament teams. Certainly in our league every single night you're playing against an NCAA tournament, roster, coach, team and talent.

Two tournaments in March. We're fortunate enough to know we're going to participate in both. We actually came here to win this tournament. I know a lot of people don't understand that. We set this up. We always say the first game in any tournament is the most important. It's a singular focus, laser focus. Only thing we talked about was our first game.

Four-team tournament. We beat bye, we got the bye. So that was the first game. Today we won the four-team tournament. So now it's onto the next four-team tournament. Again, the most important game in any tournament is the first game. Now it's all Auburn.

We'll obviously have to play our best 40 minutes of the season. That's no different when you get to the NCAA tournament. You better put your best 40 out there, especially as the rounds continue.

**Q. We noticed Mikeal Brown-Jones wasn't necessarily on the bench today. Is there a plan for him moving forward?**

CHRIS BEARD: Absolutely. Just had a personal today. We hope he can rejoin the team as quick as possible. It's just a personal issue, period. Mikeal is a big, big part of this team. We don't win this game today if Mikeal Brown is not on this team.

**Q. You mentioned what you think of this Arkansas team. What have you made of the turnaround that they made from the 0-5 start they had?**

CHRIS BEARD: Here's my look on it. It starts with Coach Cal. He's been doing this a long time. Not just Kentucky, lead story on SportsCenter every night, but at other schools around the way. UMass, Memphis, others.

He knows what he's doing. It's proven over time. I think their team, like most teams, has changed throughout the year. They had a lot of adversity early, things they couldn't control. When the dust settles, in my opinion, a



second-weekend type team. The seven guys in their rotation right now are really, really good players.

We value this as a huge win, almost like a second weekend-type win for us.

I think with Cal, when he got to 0-5 or something, I just kept explaining to our guys in the locker room as we watched the SEC lists, when I say these are NCAA tournament teams, I never had Arkansas not on that list, even despite the 0-5, because with that talent on the roster and that coach, it was just a matter of time till they figured it out.

I would argue they're playing the best basketball in the country right now. Six out of their last seven in the SEC, five out of the last six wins, you think about this league, you think about a two-game winning streak in this conference is a honeymoon, a vacation. They want to built a statue for you if you get to three in a row.

For Arkansas to be playing the kind of ball they are right now in late February and March I think speaks a lot about their talent and coach.

**Q. I know it's a team game, but you talked about personal challenges, going up against Hall of Fame John Calipari. You take on Bruce Pearl next. How satisfying is it for someone like you to play against those guys, find a way to beat 'em?**

CHRIS BEARD: I'm not sure what you mean by somebody like me. We won at Fort Scott, Seminole, McMurray, South Carolina, Angelo State, Little Rock, we won at Texas Tech, we won at Texas. This is year two, and we're winning at Ole Miss. I don't say that as a self-promotion way at all. I'm going to take up for our staff and players. The way you worded that...

This isn't my first rodeo. I might look young because I got a haircut last night. I have this trendy beard that my daughters like. I've been doing this for a minute.

Anytime you have a chance to coach against a Hall of Fame coach, absolutely. We all understand that. To say anything different would not be truthful. In this league it's almost every single night.

Coach Cal and tomorrow Bruce Pearl. Yeah, we'll see where we stack up. But this is not our first rodeo.

**Q. Following up on what Malik was saying about this league strengthening the team for the NCAA tournament, do you believe that, or do you worry about wear and tear?**

CHRIS BEARD: I think both ways. That's a conversation that basketball people have. Even the coaches talk about that in their spring meetings. It's the gauntlet.

Especially the two teams that play on Sunday in this tournament, you turn back around, you could be playing on Thursday.

One, the obvious, you're playing against great competition for two and a half months. You're going to be prepared. There's nobody you're going to see on that bracket that you haven't faced those types of challenges.

Two, the other side of the coin, it's worth thinking about because this is an absolute grind. I think there will be other teams in the tournament, not that they've rested, but they haven't had this mental and physical challenge twice a week since early January.

When I was younger, I would always go, Players can play. We grew up playing all day long. It doesn't matter.

But we got a banged-up team. I think everybody in this tournament is probably banged up in some way. I know recovery, sleep, hydration, rest. When I first got started at this, our practice would be two and a half hours. Our practice schedule is 45 minutes now. We understand that recovery and rest and mental rest, as well, is really important.

I think nobody will know until we see. We'll see what happens, if this league produces second-weekend teams, third-weekend teams, has a couple teams in the Final Four. It will be interesting to see. From a basketball fan, I pay attention to that, too.

**Q. Sean said he knew he was 0-6, but shooters shoot. What is it like to coach a guy with that type of mindset?**

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, we got a few of those guys. They're just guys that have extreme confidence no matter what the situation, score. Short-term memory. Sean is one of those guys. We got several of those guys on this team, which is another reason why I think we have a chance to be a factor tonight.

Tonight, perfect example, five guys in double-figure scoring. That was the design. All these guys checked their ego in the recruiting process. They knew what they were signing up for here. We never talk about leading scorer, points per game. Sean has courage. He wants the ball in that moment. We have couple other guys with that mindset, as well.

