

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Missouri Tigers

Coach Dennis Gates

Tony Perkins

Tamar Bates

Postgame Press Conference

Missouri 85, Mississippi State 73

THE MODERATOR: We'll take an opening statement from Coach Gates, then have questions for the players.

DENNIS GATES: I am extremely proud of our program, our team, our coaching staff. We had great preparation mentally, physically and emotionally. I thought the atmosphere was great. Our SEC tournament speaks for itself. I'll say this loud and proud, there should be 14 teams in the NCAA tournament from our conference.

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

Q. After Mark Mitchell goes down, what does it say about the depth of the team that you were able to step up?

TAMAR BATES: I mean, in every interview, every time we talk, whether we've had somebody injured or not, we always emphasize being 18 strong. It wasn't anything new to us because that's just our mentality. That's who we are.

TONY PERKINS: Mainly we got 18 deep. Like Tamar said. Always be ready to play. You never know. Everybody's ready tonight, so that's just what we about.

DENNIS GATES: I'm extremely proud of Aidan Shaw and his protection and what he was able to do in his 12 minutes of play.

Q. What did you see out there compared to the last two games, and how were you able to take advantage of the Bulldogs' defense?



TAMAR BATES: What I saw was us get stops and defend. We've given up I think 90 points over the last four games, so...

I just saw us communicating. I saw us flying around, helping each other. That's things we've done throughout the season. We just got away from it a little bit.

Yeah, that's what I saw. Obviously we were able to score a little bit. But everything started for us on the defensive side of the ball.

TONY PERKINS: Started getting stops, do what we need to do, get out, get fast-break points. That led to where we was able to keep scoring and keep getting stops.

Q. Tony, as the point guard against a defense that is that aggressive, that athletic, how was this team able to continue getting buckets when you were getting stops on the defensive end to create that separation?

TONY PERKINS: Just not letting the ball stick, move the ball around, make 'em shift. Eventually when you keep doing that every possession, if they don't get a fast-break point, they tired. Like we say, we 18 strong. We don't get tired. Kept swinging. Everything opened up for us.

Q. What has it been like going through this conference this year?

TAMAR BATES: I mean, it pretty much speaks for itself in terms of how impressive the SEC has been. Obviously I knew it was going to be extremely tough watching everybody play throughout non-conference. I mean, it's not titled NBA South for no reason.

You got to come to play every night. I feel like this conference has prepared us, and obviously every other team that's going to hear their name called on Sunday, for March Madness.

TONY PERKINS: I would say every game is a battle, regardless of who you playing. Playing the best team, the worst team they say in the conference. At the end of the



day, every night, it's a battle. Every night might be a football game, so you never know.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, you're dismissed. We'll continue with questions for Coach Gates.

Q. I didn't see the play, but what happened with Mark Mitchell? Any update on his status?

DENNIS GATES: I don't even know what happened, to be honest with you. I'm saying that honestly. I just take and adhere to what our doctors and our trainers say. I don't question those individuals at all.

Mark knows what he can and cannot do. He didn't want to put our team in a disadvantage if he's not at 100%. So at the end of the day, he trusted our substitutions and our depth, and he just didn't put himself back into the game.

For me, that's a sign of great leadership. We'll see what the prognosis is.

Q. (No microphone.)

DENNIS GATES: I don't have an update. I would love to give you guys answers because you deserve it, no question. I just don't have any.

Q. The fact that there was talk of him coming back in then, is that still...

DENNIS GATES: There was talk. There was talk absolutely. It's doctors' and player's decision. I wasn't on the bench. I kind of stand up the entire game. I look down, see who's available. It happened in the first half, correct, yeah, so...

I don't know yet. I'll get that information. Our SID, Jason, will release something if something needs to be released. I think we have the injury reports or something like that, right?

Q. You get another matchup with Florida on the SEC quarterfinals. You handed them their only home loss this season. The challenge of facing them a second time?

DENNIS GATES: They're a No. 1 seed in the NCAA tournament. I don't know the strength of that No. 1 seed, but they're one of the top two, three teams in the country, in my eyes.

I think no one has given them the amount of credit that they deserve. I don't know if they were even ranked No. 1 in the country for multiple weeks, but I do know that's how I

look at 'em.

It was a great atmosphere when we played in Gainesville. Todd Golden, I respect him, I respect their entire program. They're not the same team that they were then. I think they have gotten better. I think they've added a crucial piece to try to make an SEC Championship run and NCAA title run with their big fella. He's back. He's one of the best players in our conference.

Obviously the number of games he played didn't allow him to be on the All-Conference team, but he's an All-Conference type of guy.

So for me, both teams have gotten better. Both teams have gone through the storm of the regular season SEC. We're excited to break down film. They've been patiently waiting in their double bye, which they earned, to pursue an SEC title.

Q. Your defense basically didn't allow a field goal for the final five minutes of the game. What did you see from the defense?

DENNIS GATES: Well, we allow free throws and we fouled. That's what I do recall. The other part of it is, I thought our guys contested shots without fouling because they did a good job. Hubbard, as well as -- who was it? -- Melendez that got fouled on three-point shots or even near the basket. I thought our guys set down, defended, rebounded, and played connected basketball.

We went into our four-minute drill. They did a great job.

Q. Mississippi State seemed like they were really keying on Caleb there, limited his opportunities. That led things to open up for some of your other guys. Did you have to make any adjustments offensively based on what they were doing against him?

DENNIS GATES: I thought when you look at the body of work of Chris Jans throughout his career, he essentially has always had one of the top defensive teams in the country. This team is the same way. They're one of the top defensive teams in our conference just from a strategic standpoint, their toughness and obviously their personnel.

When it comes down to Caleb Grill, he went 2-11. Do I think they stopped him from shooting? No. I think he rushed some shots. But he made a crucial three to close out the half that gave us a sort of cushion.

He ended up doing a great job playing connected basketball, and he ended up with three assists. He accounted definitely for some points. Ultimately the gravity

and attention that he provides allows our guards to get downhill simply because he cruised, Tamar Bates, and even Trent Pierce and Marques Warrick are respected shooters. You have to play those guys a certain way.

What I'm thankful is is that Tony Perkins and Bates had the game that they had. Those two guys obviously have done a great job. They filled in some areas. We shot 28 free throws obviously late. Our execution from the line was a little bit better than it was last outing.

Q. The big buckets you had tonight came out of cuts, Caleb moved well. What does that say about your team's connectivity on offense and how well you move without the basketball?

DENNIS GATES: So I thought it started defensively, first and foremost. Secondly, we had probably close to 20 fast-break points where the game kind of evolved a little bit in the second half in our favor. We came back in halftime with a negative assist-to-turnover ratio. That got to an even and parallel number and stat, which is helpful. Obviously finishing with 14 assists, 14 turnovers is great.

Mississippi State took care of the basketball tonight. They did a tremendous job. But our field goal percentage defense in that first half as well as the second half, like you said, that spurt of four minutes, they only shot a free throw or made a free throw. I thought our defense stepped up in a great way.

Q. You talk about finishing with the assist-to-turnover ratio. What does it mean after starting with eight turnovers in the contest to see your guys continue and grow and play with confidence?

DENNIS GATES: Some was unforced, but Mississippi State, again, Chris Jans, his identity and characteristics of his team, they force some turnovers. They obviously do a great job sealing baseline.

I thought our guys were trying to make the right play. Mississippi State just made better defensive plays, and they were able to force us to some turnovers.

I thought we settled down a little bit. You think of their eight offensive rebounds in the first half. Four of 'em were dead ball, meaning we didn't secure the ball, and they were able to get baseline out-of-bounds.

We simplified that or solved it in the second half, and we were a little bit more stronger with the ball. I thought we played on our toes, not our heels. Our guys were quick and responsive and instinctual.

The other things is we held the lead for 26 minutes. We didn't panic when Mississippi State took the lead in the second half. I thought our guys, you saw their experience, you saw them make big plays. I didn't have to really use all my timeouts. I allowed them to get through it. They got through it and did a great job against the press late.

I just thought personnel-wise we did some great things, and I'm eager to look at the film and obviously prepare for our next game.

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