

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 14, 2025

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Kentucky Wildcats

Coach Mark Pope

Otega Oweh

Koby Brea

Postgame Press Conference



mentality. Obviously it sucks to see Lamont go down. He's one of the toughest guys out there. We just had to keep on fighting. There was still much game left. A lot of guys answered the call and just stepped up.

**Q. Have you been a part of a finish like that before? Afterwards, what was that moment like enjoying it with Kentucky fans?**

KOBY BREA: You actually wouldn't believe me if I told you, but this isn't the first time he does this (smiling). Against actually the same team.

Yeah, it was super unbelievable to see it again. We were just talking in the locker room. The first time, felt like we were in a movie going through it. This time it felt like a movie to this. He has a part two to this, creating sequel. We'll have to see what's next (smiling).

**Q. You weren't here the last couple years, but Kentucky struggled in this tournament recently. The fans have been desperate to get a win. How badly did you want to deliver?**

OTEGA OWEH: I mean, we just wanted to go out there and compete at the highest level. Like you said, we weren't here the past couple years. For us, we just come in with a fresh mind, try to compete every single day.

I mean, we're not coming here just to play the game. We're trying to win. At the end of the day, that's what it is.

KOBY BREA: Piggyback off of what he said, our coach, he does a great job of letting us know what we're playing for. We're playing for ourselves and the university. Obviously there's a whole lot of more people that games like this impact.

Just trying to represent the whole state of Kentucky really.

**Q. There was a lot of moments, up and down, emotions. How do you know, going through all this, losing Lamont, but tomorrow there's another game to play, how do you reset, stay fresh for tomorrow?**

Kentucky 85, Oklahoma 84

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Kentucky. We'll start with players.

KOBY BREA: First of all, still in disbelief what just happened. Otega Oweh, special, special player. It's unbelievable what he just did out there. Shout-out to our teammates. The young guys really came up, and they grew up today. They made some big-time plays down the stretch there that were super important. Amari, BG, Lamont Butler, just everybody. Everybody made an impact today. Happy about the win.

We'll be taking questions now (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players.

MARK POPE: Future coach, guys.

**Q. Otega, take us through the final play. What was drawn up in the huddle there during the timeout? Were you behind the backboard when you took off to take that shot?**

OTEGA OWEH: Well, the play was to do a little hook, just try to catch the ball on the move. I don't know. I think, like, my body was kind of on the side, leaning towards out-of-bounds, but my arm was still inbounds. I just wanted to try to get it up or get fouled, so...

**Q. When Lamont goes out, it's next man up, but how can you avoid saying, Oh, no, not again? What was the mindset?**

OTEGA OWEH: I mean, we just had a next-man-up

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KOBY BREA: Yeah, I mean, I feel like this one already happened. We're hungry for what's to come. We're just looking forward to the next game. We know that we have a tough opponent. It's going to be a good challenge for us to play them for the third time, hopefully come up with a win.

Yeah, we're just look are forward to it.

**Q. On the final play, was there any doubt in your mind you were taking that shot? When you let it go, did you know it was in?**

OTEGA OWEH: I just wanted to get to the paint and then whatever happens happens. I kind of saw like a little gap to get a shot off. I mean, I shot it to try to make it. Kind of felt good.

MARK POPE: Did it kind of feel good?

OTEGA OWEH: It felt great.

MARK POPE: All of us would like to know exactly what that felt like (smiling).

**Q. You said you weren't here the last couple years. I know you knew Kentucky fans packed out this event. Were you surprised by the level of attendance of Kentucky fans? How important was it to get off to that start?**

OTEGA OWEH: Yeah, I mean, Big Blue Nation never fails to surprise me. Obviously, I heard about it. But just living in the moment, it's crazy. It was packed out, so much blue, so much energy. We feed off of that, so...

This is something that we're all going to remember. We just got to cherish these moments and be where our feet are. It's just definitely a blessing to be here and playing for the state of Kentucky.

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

**Q. Any update on Lamont?**

MARK POPE: Yeah, so we did some imaging at halftime, some manual testing. We'll know more probably by tomorrow. We'll know a little more.

**Q. The last play, looked like they were trying to do some type of a trap, 1-2-2 type of zone thing. Did you know get to Otega and he's so fast on the floor?**

MARK POPE: It's hard. It's really hard. It's actually not an

easy thing. We were actually playing at Oklahoma a few weeks ago, and it was the end of the first half. We tried to do the same thing. Jeremiah raced down the floor. You're trying to be conscious about guarding legal. It's actually really hard to do.

I thought it was a good call by them. Just really tough to execute when Otega made a play like that.

**Q. With Lamont, what is the decision-making going into a situation like that when it is a game every day, knowing the NCAA tournament is next week? Do you approach that differently if it were a Tuesday/Saturday game in the regular season?**

MARK POPE: I mean, you go through so many emotions. It's hard to explain. I was really proud of our guys and our team because your heart is just breaking for Lamont. We already have Jack sitting over there. Now Lamont misses the opportunity to be a part of this. It is devastating. It's devastating, guys, for him.

It's like a gut punch. You're dealing with that emotion but trying to put it away so you can stay focused on the game. Our guys did an unbelievable job of doing that.

We'll put it together piece by piece. I'm praying like crazy, I will be, that he can find his way back on the floor some point this year. It just doesn't seem fair. This is not a fair game. I'm not saying that, but man, I would like so badly for him to be able to step on a court again. We'll see how it goes.

**Q. On the final play, was Otega playing A, B and C?**

MARK POPE: We had Koby in the corner, and we had A.C. diving late. We thought we would get downhill pretty quick. It was 5.4 or 5.6. We got the inbounds pass, the free-throw line. It was just a three-quarter court. We felt like we could get downhill pretty quickly.

There were secondary things. In that sense, we kind of talked about it. Listen, let's bum-rush to the rim and see what develops. Otega made a great play.

That's not really the story. The story is this. The story is, like, if I just talk about the last play, you lose the greatness of the moment. The greatness of the moment is that Otega turned it over two times in a row in the last minute, blowing a 10-point lead, which I'm responsible for, he's responsible for, everybody is responsible for.

What makes that moment so spectacular is he was somehow able, our team was somehow able, to move past the devastation of just kicking to the curb an emotional,

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hard-fought win and losing Lamont and all the things that came with that.

These guys, these really special guys, that love Kentucky so much and want so badly to perform for this team, they were like, Okay, this thing went totally bad on us, we totally messed this up, all of us, myself included, and then they still stayed present enough to make a game-winning play in the last five seconds. That's why that play is so special, right?

That's why I couldn't be more proud of Otega and the whole team for doing that.

**Q. What drew you guys to Otega in the portal initially? What is the reality compared to what you thought you were getting?**

MARK POPE: I had the unfortunate experience of playing against Otega in Oklahoma last year. So you go through five games plus of scouting him. We got to know him really well during the season. He just is an elite, elite, elite level athlete and a terrific, terrific defensive player that can really get downhill. That's what we knew about him.

Then you start the recruiting process. You start talking to his mom and dad, his brother. You get to know him. Wow, this guy, you see the stuff on paper, but when you start to get to see the inside of him, it gets really exciting. I had the same experience with every sim one of the guys on this roster.

**Q. Last time you played Oklahoma, tempers got hot and flared. Did you make a special effort today to address the team in regard to that?**

MARK POPE: Yeah, we spent a lot of time talking about it. I think Oklahoma did as well. We're super proud of both teams. I think both teams were very, very specific and pointed about making sure that this was about the game.

I couldn't be more proud of our guys, and the guys on the Oklahoma team. Lee Anne will make fun of me because I'm saying this because we just won. I think that's pretty special for two teams to come in with a really, really heated, emotional, ton of personal attacking commentary, then to come to this game and exhibit the self-control to just make it a great game. I think that's a really special commentary on these kids. I think it's actually pretty cool.

**Q. One more Butler question. What consideration might you have even if he is able to play tomorrow of just shutting him down and seeing if he can get healthier in a week?**

MARK POPE: I mean, I'm not going to put him in harm's way for sure. It's hard 'cause this matters. Like, it's hard to explain. When you walk into this arena and you finish a game like that, and the whole game you see all these people. These Kentucky fans, it's an arena full of Kentucky fans. Most of these Kentucky fans probably have never been able to go watch a game at Rupp Arena because they can't get in.

They save and plan for a year to come here and do this. I know that sounds unique, and it is really unique. So there's just this massive pull of our guys. This is our family, we want to take care of them, we want to perform for them. We want this to be great and special for them. You're also thinking about the NCAA tournament.

This is real for us. This matters for us. The NCAA tournament obviously matters for us. We'll just figure it out the best we can. We'll make the best decisions for Lamont that we can, for sure.

**Q. A lot of the questions seem to be centered around Lamont and the final moment. We don't see you get frustrated much. Seemed like you got a little frustrated there when Collin Chandler went down and was bleeding. Walk us through that moment, how tough Collin was.**

MARK POPE: Trying to decide how honest I should be actually (smiling).

First of all, it was fine. It's all basketball, right? It's all basketball. There were two times when I got a little bit distracted. That was one of them. It just is what it is. It just is what it is.

Really proud of Collin. He ran back, got stitches, came back in. We made sure he remembered his middle name, then threw him back out there. It's incredible what he's doing.

I'm really proud of him. Super fun opportunity for him to show his toughness and his dedication to this team. It certainly did.

It's fun to watch these guys grow, man. It's just really rewarding to watch these guys grow. Collin is certainly growing in huge ways and getting a chance to show it.

**Q. Some players talk about when they play against their former teams maybe their coach has to talk to them about tempering emotions. Did you have to talk to Otega at all? Has he always had this resolve since he's gotten here that he seems to have?**

MARK POPE: Well, listen, I think it's a lot of things. I think Otega has great people that he really loves at Oklahoma. It's just the nature of the thing. I think part of these two games also is the makeup of the teams and the style of play we both choose to play. In this case it leaves a ton of gap space for Otega to penetrate that he might not see in other situations.

I know there's something about it. We always talk about when you compete against family, it's always more, right? Maybe there's something to that. In terms of tempering Otega, there's nothing specific about Oklahoma. It's just helping him try and stay focused on the things that make him great. He's done a great job with that.

Man, I'm telling you guys, super special. Otega was one of the most distractable guys that we had on our team when we started this season. Like, he was one of the most distractable guys. You talk about like a brilliant moment of not being distractable. It's so awesome. So proud of him. That's probably the more fun part of the story.

**Q. The beauty of the tournament is you get to turn around and play another game right away. Are there challenges when you're coming off such an emotional high to get these guys refocused?**

MARK POPE: Yeah, it's incredibly challenging. That's why it's March magic, right? It's March magic. If you can do it, then you do it, right?

We get to be tested in an epic way. We lost twice to Alabama. They're a top four or five team in the country. We're a little beat up and a little shorthanded. All that's fine.

That's actually where you write the great stories. That's why we're all attracted to March, is because there are just these few teams that step up and do things that nobody thinks they can do, under major duress and all kinds of problems. If you don't want to be part of that, don't go to March.

We are dying to be a part of that. We want it so bad. We're going to go fight and we're going to see what we can do tomorrow.

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