

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 14, 2025

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

**Auburn Tigers**

**Coach Bruce Pearl**

**Denver Jones**

**Johni Broome**

Postgame Press Conference



Auburn 62, Ole Miss 57

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue on with Auburn. We'll ask Coach Pearl for a couple general comments on the game, then take questions.

BRUCE PEARL: Just want to congratulate Ole Miss on a great season so far. That team is capable of going to the NCAA tournament and making some noise. Older team, group of veterans. They obviously play the right way.

I think just a couple things. Our three-point field goal defense has been pretty elite. The fact that I've got bigs that can get out there and guard the perimeter, guards that can go inside, physically be able to handle some things.

When you hold a good offensive team like Ole Miss to 22 points in the first half, you obviously deserve victory.

Denver was great in the first half. He's always the best defensive player out there on the floor. Then Johni carries us. He puts us on his shoulders and is one of the best competitors I think I've ever met. He hates to lose at everything. His teammates know that.

It was a good team effort.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Chaney hit a pretty big three with six minutes to go. How big was that as far as momentum?**

DENVER JONES: Man, that was a big shot. I feel like we had a little slow stretch, especially with a lot of foul calls against us. They were shooting a lot of free throws. Chaney standing ready for that big opportunity, and he

knocked down the shot.

**Q. Denver, you had the team's first six points. How important was that fast start?**

DENVER JONES: Just wanted to come out aggressive, just looking for my shot, just playing basketball. It just paid off today.

**Q. Johni, could you take us through the winning basket that you made when you had to have it with 11 seconds left.**

JOHNI BROOME: Well, I know I was going to the basket regardless. I faded away for the last bucket with Alabama. I told my teammates that won't happen again, I'm going to take a better shot.

I just knew. They gave it to me again, trusted me again. I just had to finish for them this time.

**Q. Denver, five of eight from the field, 13 points. This is your third time playing Ole Miss. Can you talk about the difficulties of beating a team three times in one season.**

DENVER JONES: It's pretty hard, especially in the conference we in. Obviously they scouted us both times we played them. Playing them a third time, they would have most of our players pretty much scouted.

Ole Miss is a tough team to play, the way they guard, the way they run the offense. But we just came out with the victory today.

**Q. Johni, when you get the ball with your back to the basket, how many options do you think you have?**

JOHNI BROOME: A lot (smiling).

**Q. You have the 18th double-double to tie Mike Mitchell's program record. What does it mean to have that program record?**



JOHNI BROOME: Shout-out to Mike Mitchell. BP talks about it all the time, especially this season, just trying to keep trying to make history. I play for the name on the front and back of my jersey, so Auburn means a lot to me. Just to be a part of history, cementing myself into Auburn history means a lot to me.

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

**Q. I could tell you're kind of looking over the shoulder, watching the game. Whoever you play it's going to be a big turnout. What is the message to the Auburn fans for tomorrow that they need to come out strong?**

BRUCE PEARL: Yeah, I mean, we're not that far from north Alabama. We asked them last time when we played in the championship game, I asked them if they might skip early church last year and head on up. It paid off for us (smiling).

It will be a great crowd tomorrow. Something that jumps out at me. Today the top four seeds are playing. Today. How good was yesterday? Like, forget about the top four seeds. How good was yesterday? How good was the quality of basketball? How hard were those kids competing?

I think the SEC has a lot to be proud of, not just because we hopefully get 14 teams in. But I think our kids in this tournament, they're honoring the game, the way they're competing, playing. Can't be disappointed with all these close games. It just tells you how good the league is.

Our kids respect each other in this league.

**Q. What's it like coaching Chad? There's a lot there. How do you manage him?**

BRUCE PEARL: Dr. Tom Davis was my mentor. Tom was incredibly patient. He really did believe that our job, when we get these kids, is to give them some space, let them be themselves. That was when you get the best out of them.

At the same time we recognize Chad is incredibly emotional, passionate. His moods do swing. They do. First of all, like the flagrant twos are not acceptable. I didn't start him tonight. He recognized it, he's accountable.

Look, the opponents are going to see if they can get under his skin and see if he will retaliate. He can't do that.

Our guys are pretty hard on themselves. Think about this. There wasn't that much expected from Auburn at the start of the season. Good team, older team, probably won't win

the league, but be a tournament team. All of a sudden this team is No. 1 in the country for six or seven weeks. Now a bunch of underdog kids from mid-majors, different levels, now we have to live up to what that expectation is.

I think sometimes the kids feel a little bit of that pressure. So Chad, which one are we going to get? My point to him is like, Look, I don't care which one we get, just from the standpoint of how you perform. He's so hard on himself.

I need you to be there and locked in and don't let the bad plays affect you. He's too hard on himself. You could see in the first half, he wasn't great.

A lot of those balls that went into Johni Broome went in from Chad Baker-Mazara, six assists, one turnover. He got a chance to play point guard for us. Ball in his hands, good things are going to happen.

**Q. Johni's spin move, how does that affect the game for you?**

BRUCE PEARL: He's old school. He's got old-school footwork. He's got great feet. I think one of the things, again, like the play where he saved the ball before it went out of bounds is a play that only a great athlete can make.

But because he can't jump, they don't think he's a very good athlete. It has nothing to do with athleticism. Because of his athleticism, he's got such a good base. He's able to put you on his hip and go and spin off of you.

Now, everybody knows he's a right shoulder, left hand cover. If you overdo it too much, he can go the other way.

He's obviously an excellent passer, not just when the ball is in the post, but also on the perimeter. He has real good skills and real good feel.

**Q. Chris Beard called this a slow defensive game. He also said he didn't feel like they got beat, they just ran out of time. Can you talk about the importance of being able to win a game like this.**

BRUCE PEARL: Well, I think, look, we don't win many games when we turn the ball over 15 times. But Ole Miss turns people over 13, maybe 13 1/2. They're one of the best teams in our league at turning people over.

Dia was a really problem with three steals and jumping out in some of those passing lanes. Jaylen Murray with five steals.

We have got to do a better job of handling that pressure, taking care of the ball. It was almost a factor in our getting



beat. But that's what Ole Miss does. They turn you over. Then they get you in transition.

Look, we hold Ole Miss to 57 points. I don't know how many times they've scored 57 points all year. We held them to 57 points. Defensive rebounding wins championships. That's obviously what carried the day.

**Q. You already talked about Chad not getting the start. Chris Moore got the start tonight. Effective minutes for him. Talk about what he gives to you guys, specifically on the defensive end.**

BRUCE PEARL: Sometimes less can be more. Chris sets good screens, runs offense, trying not to look for himself, the other four guys have opportunities. Defensively he's a glue guy. He talks, communicates, can switch one through five. That's one of our strengths this year, we switched Ole Miss as much as anybody is going to switch them.

Chris, he's one of our team leaders, one of our captains. Been here five years. Graduated. We trust him.

**Q. Talking about defense, I think they had two made field goals when they tied the game up. Their six assists was one of your best defensive performances. Back to the way you play defense, that was a big focus. Talk about getting that effort, being locked in there.**

BRUCE PEARL: You know what? Because Chad Baker was in foul trouble, we were running offense and defense for him. It put Chris on the floor, which always makes us better defensively and physically.

When you as a coach try to give your kids what's the formula, how can I trust that if we do these things, we can win. If you can control your effort, energy on the defensive end, if you can get stops, you can win.

Ball is not always going to go in. Team has to make plays. You have to make free throws. If you can sit your ass down and guard, limit them to one shot, you can control that.

That's what our message was.

**Q. What makes Steven such a good defensive coach? What has he done for you guys?**

BRUCE PEARL: That's such a great question. Thank you.

As I get older, I've given Steven Pearl more, and he's taken it on. Then Mike Burgomaster is my offensive coordinator. I've given him more responsibility to play call.

Those two guys working together, whew. Steven is studying the opponent, what adjustments Chris Beard makes. He wanted us, Steven really wanted us to switch in this game, bodies on bodies. He felt strongly about it. So his eyes are going to the defensive end.

Mike is focusing on offense. So I trust those two guys.

Billy Donovan said one time, most coaches are pretty good defensive coaches. Most coaches get their guys to play hard. But the great ones separate themselves on offense.

One of the things that made Billy Donovan such a great offensive coach was he understood defense. Steven understands how to defend. Together those two guys are a pretty good weapon.

Our defensive and defensive coordinators in basketball don't make quite as much as the football guys. That's the only difference. I got to get my coordinators paid more.

**Q. You mentioned pressure a couple of times. There's a pressure of winning, then the pressure of expecting to be the winner. In the post-season everything ratchets up tenfold. How do you personally deal with that? How would you evaluate yourself?**

BRUCE PEARL: That's such a great question.

Listen, because of my faith and my relationship with my Lord, I trust Him. If this is what the plan is, I'm okay with it.

Sometimes that trust takes a little bit of anxiety away. It just does. That doesn't mean it's an excuse for failure. It's not.

To me, that's really, really important. I want my kids to have that. I do. They don't want to disappoint the Auburn family. We go to the NCAA tournament, we don't want to disappoint the SEC.

We recognize when we get 14 teams in, everybody is going to be evaluating whether we deserve 14 teams or not based on how we play in the NCAA tournament. That's not a good barometer. We deserve 14 teams in because of what we did in the non-conference.

I want all of our teams, including mine, to go in without that pressure of living up to the SEC got 14 teams in. Hey, we're Auburn. We don't have a ton of history in the NCAA tournament, okay? I want my guys feeling like they're playing with house money, they still got something to prove.



Those are the things I'll try to do through faith. Nobody picked us to win. Look at the pre-season. If Duke is 1 and Houston is 2, were they not 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 in everybody's poll? They were. Auburn wasn't. We didn't deserve to be. We are now, though.

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