

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 14, 2025

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

**Missouri Tigers**

**Coach Dennis Gates**

**Anthony Robinson III**

**Tamar Bates**

Postgame Press Conference

Florida 95, Missouri 80

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach Gates.

DENNIS GATES: Great atmosphere. SEC tournament. Played a great basketball team in the University of Florida. They are a 1 seed in my eyes. They obviously played like it.

We've learned a lot throughout our 33 games that got us here. But I'll say this. We've had 18 quad one games out of the 33. That's most in the nation. That is a stat that I think is indicative and is something that we all have to keep in context.

Seven quad one wins. Each win was very difficult. Each win taught us something about ourselves. I believe the No. 1 team in the country, Duke, I think we're tied with them. Is that right, Jason? We're tied with Duke with the number of quad one wins this year.

We finished sixth obviously in the conference. That's an accomplishment for us. We still left opportunities out there to finish higher. We were only one of two schools nationally with three top-five wins. If we would have gotten one tonight, I thought that would have put us in a great position.

But I'm proud of our guys. I'm proud of our program. We'll debrief how we need to debrief.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Walter Clayton had 17 of his 18 points in the first half. What was the adjustments on defense in the**



**second half?**

TAMAR BATES: I think we just did a better job of executing the game plan, making him see more bodies, contesting more of his passes so he wasn't able to just easily hit the short roll when there was a pick and roll. When he got off of it, whoever was guarding him, did a good job of denying him, making sure he didn't get the ball back.

He didn't play for a little bit in the second half. I think he cramped up. For the time he was in the second half, we did a better job of executing the defensive game plan on him.

ANTHONY ROBINSON II: To piggyback off Tamar, he was cramping a little bit. But I think we focused on coach's grand slam more. Made it a little bit more difficult on him with ball pressure, things of that nature.

Yeah, we just executed coach's game plan.

**Q. Tamar, getting the offensive rebounds that you were able to get, the second-chance opportunities, what went into that, especially playing smaller today?**

TAMAR BATES: That definitely helped us stay in the game and close the gap 'cause most of them resulted in either free throws or a quick stick-back layup.

I mean, getting offensive rebounds is something that we emphasize. I mean, we emphasize it all season. I mean, we were able to execute that tonight. It's just about a willingness to crash the offensive glass. When we do, most of the time we get double-digit offensive rebounds. It goes in our favor.

**Q. How tough was it for you guys to not have Mark tonight? How did that affect y'all's lineup?**

ANTHONY ROBINSON II: It was tough having our leading scorer out there. But we're 18 strong, and it's next person up. We believe in each other. We want everyone to be successful on our team. Our connectivity off the court is



what believes in 18 strong. We want everyone to be successful on our team.

**Q. You guys lit Florida up from three in Gainesville. What did they do tonight to defend you guys better?**

TAMAR BATES: I think their game plan - not I think, but I could tell from how they were playing us, guarding shooters, whether it was a ball screen or in transition, they were okay with us playing one on one or more so two on two. Like if it was a big guarding, they were just hugged up on all the shooters, close enough to touch.

If we relocated or not, they just weren't going to leave whether it was Grill, Crews, myself, Perkins. I mean, their game plan was just to play one on one, two on two, not leave shooters because we did really shoot the ball well against them the first time around.

**Q. Anthony, Coach Gates went over your accomplishments throughout the season. How much do you think that has prepared you guys for potentially making some noise in the NCAA tournament?**

ANTHONY ROBINSON II: You know, our schedule, we played a lot of great teams in this conference. I believe it prepared us for this next season we have. We're just going to follow what coaches have to say, game plan, go forward with that.

THE MODERATOR: Players are dismissed. We'll continue with questions for Coach Gates.

**Q. I believe you said yesterday that Florida was playing a little bit different than the last time you faced them. Could you elaborate, what they've adjusted?**

DENNIS GATES: I'm not going to give that game plan out because the next game in my eyes, I want to see the SEC successful in the NCAA tournament. I'm not going to give what you think of any team in this conference away to somebody else.

But I would say this respectfully, that's a great question, okay? It's a great question. I really mean that. That's a great question. I'm not trying to be rude to you. But I do like to respect our opponents, especially when I know that somebody will be preparing for them outside of this conference, and they'll listen to press conferences.

What I would say is they shot the heck out the basketball. They were shooting 80% for a long period of time. It seemed like they wouldn't miss. There was no mistakes that they made. They are balanced. They can play in different styles.

You have an All-Conference First-Team point guard who should be a first-round draft pick, who should also be mentioned as a national Player of the Year candidate because ultimately the University of Florida is a title contender. I'll say that again, University of Florida is a title contender.

They're the only team in this historic conference who did not have a losing streak. 15 out of 16 teams had a losing streak. The University of Florida is the only team in this conference that did not experience a losing streak. That's a sign of a team that can play in April. Only four of 'em can play in April. But that is a team that can play in San Antonio.

**Q. Florida is a little bit different than they were the first time you played them because of Handlogten being back and Klavzar playing a little bit more. Do you notice them playing any differently in that regard, rotating more guys in?**

DENNIS GATES: That's a good question.

They're playing different. They've gotten better. But they were a great team when we played them at the beginning of January. They were a great team when we went into Florida, in Gainesville, and beat them.

Now, the big thing, the big picture is, they still have their rotation. Like you mentioned, you have those intangibles. You got No. 7 stepping up, playing a little bit more. You have guys settling into their roles. You have Micah back. Micah is a first-round draft pick. He is a very good player. For a kid to have and sustain that injury, he decided not to redshirt because he knew he was ready, the staff and doctors I'm sure knew he was ready, and they were obviously seeing something in practice to know he would come back and have the impact that he has.

He is very, very tall. Very, very mobile. Very, very athletic. He has a knack for the ball. You look at his analytics, offensive rebounding, he is one of the best in the country. He was that way last year, and he was that way at Marshall, as well.

His dad's a former NBA player. That kid will have a bright future in my eyes. But you look at their balance, man. Their balance is tremendous.

**Q. You dominated them on the offensive glass tonight. In Gainesville as well. What has been the common denominators there? A good matchup for you guys? Something they were not doing well?**

DENNIS GATES: I'll credit my players on this now. Our guys pursued the basketball. They did a great job pursuing the basketball. I thought we settled into the minimization of shooting threes. We attacked the paint, so we collapsed their defensive shell a little. It was players making plays. Sometimes the ball bounces certain ways, and we were in the right spots.

I wish we could have executed a little bit more on those offensive rebounds. We were plus nine, and we were only plus five points. If you're plus nine in offensive rebounds and only plus five points, they still defended our attempts. They still didn't foul in certain situations.

Now, analytically most people don't know, sometimes you don't get free throw shots and makes a part of your second-chance points. We did get to the free-throw line. That number adds to that.

I'm talking about raw field goals. We made 30 field goals. 30 field goals is a lot of field goals to make and still lose. We just couldn't overcome their high shooting. We were always that negative 10 that they started with. That entirety set us back for the 35 minutes, 40 minutes of the game because they came out blazing and did not miss those shots.

**Q. Obviously Mark Mitchell out tonight. Is there any update on his status? What kind of changes for the team when he's unavailable?**

DENNIS GATES: So you bring up a great question that I knew only you would ask, okay (smiling)?

I had to make a decision. You guys seen the statement that was released. He had a good walk-through and a good workout. A literally good basketball workout. Now big picture or short-term.

I think for Mark, he wanted to play. I had as a coach to make a tough decision. I made this decision with Kobe Brown we had No. 1 Alabama coming into CoMo, Mizzou arena. Kobe sustained an ankle tweak. I had to make another decision, right?

I'm not afraid to make the decision that I need to make for the safety of our student-athletes.

Mark wanted to play. He wanted to be out there with his team. I did not let him play. I, Coach Gates, did not let Mark Mitchell play. He wanted to play. It's on me.

Big picture is he get a couple days, have some more practices, and I just didn't want to jeopardize anything moving forward. That was important to me.

**Q. You've spoken a few times this season about wanting to be a Final Four team, to go to San Antonio. After this week, how close do you think this team is to that goal? Are you closer? Further away? What's the temperature the team right now?**

DENNIS GATES: At this moment, we won't know anything until Selection Sunday. As you know, the tournament is about matchups. It's about paths. It's about the madness that actually upsets teams in that journey.

We're going to be honored to have our name called in that. I sat here last year, and that moment I started building for this year, right? We had that in mind, that in the forefront, making sure that we set in Mizzou Arena on Selection Sunday watching our name being called. I think our guys accomplished that goal. Unless something happens in a committee meeting and they don't think, because it still hasn't been called yet, so you have the skeptical part of it.

I just hope our name is called. We'll be honored to represent our conference. Hopefully be one of 14 teams.

When you have the big view of our program and players committing how they've committed to just my vision, they may not have seen April in mind. They may not have seen San Antonio in mind.

But I remind our guys in every first meeting where the Final Four is at. That was something that we spoke about in June when everybody set in our team building meetings with Dr. Carr. At that point we saw the level of unselfishness and potential. I thought we had a chance. We just had to put it together the right way.

I credit our staff. Our staff is a great staff. We have head coaches on the staff. We cover each other's blind spots. They move the group just as I do. Our players respect 'em.

I don't know if the fact that we're not a No. 1 seed means that we can't get to the Final Four. Historically the Final Four has been all kind of numbers and seeds. It's about matchups. It's good betting on a winning streak. But you got to move one game at a time. You did not underestimate your first opponent. We're not gonna underestimate anyone. We'll respect the tournament and we'll respect who is on our bracket.

**Q. I know the big picture can be hard to think about after a loss. Do you think your team got what it needed to out of this tournament?**

DENNIS GATES: Did we get what we needed to? We did not get the trophy. We don't get the opportunity to raise a



banner. Our season 3A ends early. We wanted to be here, playing on Sunday, and we're not. So we did not accomplish a goal.

As it relates to the silver lining, we'll see what it does. But I do know we were able to win a game yesterday against a tough NCAA tournament team. And today we played a game without an All-Conference player. I thought we did pretty well.

Last night our all-conference player only played 10 minutes, a third of the game, 25% of the game, right, a quarter of the game. Our guys moved forward. We had unsung heroes. Aidan Shaw played unbelievable basketball. JOSH gray rebounded the heck out of the ball. Tony Perkins and Tamar Bates had great games. But collectively as a unit we played some great basketball.

We saw ourselves do that in a neutral site, which is great. We'll be at a neutral site playing basketball somewhere.

The next part of it is the psychological part. We'll wait around. We'll work on us in these next couple days. I just thank our fans for coming here supporting us. I thank them for what they've done throughout this season for us because they did make a difference.

We'll be able to answer that question when our season's over. Hopefully it's not over anytime soon.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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