

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 14, 2025

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Alabama Crimson Tide

Coach Nate Oats

Labaron Philon

Jarin Stevenson

Postgame Press Conference

Alabama 99, Kentucky 70

THE MODERATOR: At this time we are joined by Alabama. We'll take an opening statement from Coach Oats.

NATE OATS: We wanted to turn up our defensive intensity. Thought we did. All our ball pressure. Official back score has us 29 points off turnovers. I think our ball pressure caused us some problems.

Our plan was to try to keep them off of transition, keep them off the three-point line, pressure them on defense. On offense I thought we could attack them a little bit better downhill than we had in the past.

Obviously it's a thinner Kentucky team. They've got a lot of injuries with Robinson has been out on the year. And then Oweh got hurt a little bit. Only played 20 minutes. We were fortunate that they weren't as deep as us.

I thought our transition could get to them. I thought we ended up breaking them towards the end of the first half, early second half.

These guys played great. Best game Jarin has played all year. He's is peaking at the right time while Baron is peaking at the right time. We were able to rest some of our older guys. We're going to have to rest our older guys. We'll need them against Florida.

We earned the double bye, which helped us tonight. Kentucky played last night. They didn't look as fresh as we did. We were able to build the lead up. Sears, nobody played more than 30. Sears is pretty durable. Outside of Sears, Baron is pretty young. Nobody else played more



than 26 minutes. Nice to be able to get some rest for our guys tonight.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for the players.

Q. Labaron, to be hot at the right time in this tournament, how big is that? What is your confidence level?

LABARON PHILON: It's going to help us in the long run because I can get the guys going on defense. I just get in that mentality to just go out and take it all in, be locked in on the defensive end. Once I do that, everybody, all the guys going to be locked in together.

Q. Jarin, Coach Oats a few times this season says just once he wants to see this team play good defense and take care of the ball in the same game. Seems you did that tonight.

JARIN STEVENSON: Yeah, it was a big key, taking care of the ball, being aggressive, going out and making plays, running in transition again. That's a big thing with our offense and stuff.

That's the main thing, especially with us struggling with turnovers throughout the season. That's the big emphasis for the game today.

Q. What gave y'all the confidence to keep shooting in the second half?

LABARON PHILON: Coach Oats says it all the time, about locking in. If you're not making threes, you got to find some way else to impact the game.

They emphasize offensive rebounding, getting in, help rebounding, helping the bigs, just play hard on defense. Just control what you can control. That's a great thing.

JARIN STEVENSON: Yeah.

Q. Labaron, I counted three times had you a driving layup off of an opponent turnover tonight. Seems like



you've fed off of that energy from plays like that a lot this season. That is one of your favorites to make?

LABARON PHILON: I call it lucky plays 'cause when I'm guarding somebody else and I can just turn around and see the ball loose, grab it, see a blur in the open floor, that's going to be easy for me.

That's because of my teammates turning them over and I get the chance to go down and lay the ball up. I credit them the most.

Q. Jarin, Coach Oats talked about he thought you were due to break out. Talk about your game tonight and the rhythm you got into offensively.

JARIN STEVENSON: Yeah, just going out there, being confident, going out there making plays. I feel like, yeah, just being confident, making plays, knowing my teammates have my back. I feel like that's really helped me, especially in this game, just being confident out there.

Q. Jarin, this is the third time you've beaten Kentucky this season. What does it say you're able to do that, where you are as a program?

JARIN STEVENSON: Yeah, our guys are really good. Again, it's really tough to beat a team three times. It shows our mental strength. Kentucky is a great team. I feel like it really shows, yeah, the strength of our team and our mental strength.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, you're released. We'll continue with questions for Coach Oats.

Q. You talk about peaking at the right time. What we saw last year going to the Final Four, what Jarin did, are you saying a little bit of that? How dangerous can this team play?

NATE OATS: I hope that's coming. It looked like it tonight. I mean, if he hadn't gotten in foul trouble, he was headed for maybe a double-double. For sure he was headed for 20. He got that first drive, the and-one. Good to see him finish at the rim aggressively. Stepped up to the line with some confidence and knocked it in. He went three of five from three. He had some unfortunate fouls that kind of limited his playing time.

Shoot, he's an X factor for us with his size, athleticism, the way he can kind of play the three and four. Put him at 6'10" at the three, he's been great with the perimeter players. When he was playing as well as offense, doing what he's able to do on defense, he's a big X factor for us moving forward.

Q. You guys held them to 5-19 on threes. How big a part of the game plan was that? You mentioned the ball pressure. With Butler out, how much did you think you could disrupt the young guards?

NATE OATS: Yeah, I thought we could really pressure him. We pressured him at our place. Saw him not as much as we'd have liked.

They're down a little bit, 0-8. Five turnovers himself. Part of it, too, we have good matchups on Oweh. Kind of just overpowers most guards in this conference between Youngblood and then Dioubate. Jarin Stevenson with his length. We have different guys that are tough enough, strong enough, physical enough to kind of guard Oweh. We did a good job on him. Some of the other younger guys I thought didn't handle the pressure maybe as well.

We ended up turning it over 16 times. It's not a drastic amount. They were live ball turnovers that we went the other way and got layups and stuff off of.

With the threes, we know who their shooters are. Brea got too many off. Ended up 2-7. Perry only got three off. Kind of looking at Brea, Perry, and then Almonor, 0-2, and then Trent Noah 0-4. Those were the four we tried to focus in on. You kind of had those up there. The four main guys, too many they got off, but 3 of 16 wasn't too bad for their good shooters.

Q. This is the first 3-game win streak over Kentucky in school history. What do you think that says about the direction of the program?

NATE OATS: Yeah, we've kind of established ourselves as a top 10 program in the country over these last four or five years. Kentucky is good. We're also good. It's going to happen. I mean, hopefully there's some other teams we can rattle off some winning streaks against.

This Kentucky team, they've got a lot of injuries. They're not the full strength. We know that, so... But it's nice to get three of 'em. We had the home and away with them this year. They were a lot closer to full strength, I think they had everybody at their place. That was a big win. Now that they're kind of down, especially in their backcourt, I thought our guards really took advantage of the fact that they were a little bit thin in the backcourt tonight.

Q. You get the rematch with Florida. The familiarity of that being a factor, and rebounding was a big issue, how you address the boards in that matchup.

NATE OATS: I mean, we're going to need Cliff, Grant,



Dioubate, Jarin Stevenson. Our front court has to be a lot better than they were last game. Also our back court, to be honest with you. We just weren't very good.

There were a few positive things we did get 'em. Second half we kind of let it get to us. I thought their physicality, we're going to have to really lock into being significantly better against them.

They're one of the better teams in the country. They're fighting for a 1 seed like we are. This will be a big game for both the SEC Championship and a 1 seed.

Q. You talked in your opening about Labaron playing his best basketball right now. What did you like about his aggressiveness, driving to the rim, keep shooting threes even if they weren't falling?

NATE OATS: I told him on the one, he shot the one, I don't know if it got tipped or not, it was an air ball. He passed up a couple immediately after. I said because you miss a shot, we're not passing up open threes. That's not how we're doing I.

He stayed aggressive. He only hit the one. At least he was aggressive, which keeps him honest. He's able to get downhill.

I thought the steals and the points off turnovers kind of got him going out in transition a little bit, got him aggressive going downhill, finishing at the rim.

He was good. He's an instinctual player. Ends up with three steals. I thought his defensive intensity fueled his offense and got him going downhill.

Q. How big was it for Jarin, he had four fouls pretty early in the second half, but he came back in, able to stay on floor, played well on the defensive end? How big was it for him to stay on the floor?

NATE OATS: He got the block after he had four fouls. Ends up with three steals. Thought he was good for us defensively. It was big that he was able to stay out there. Like I said, we were able to rest some of these guys. Cliff plays 13 minutes. Grant plays 16 minutes. Some of the young guys with a little fresher legs were able to play some of the heavier minutes, especially in the front court, Jarin and Dioubate and Aiden Sherrell. Dioubate and Jarin played more minutes than Grant and Cliff.

I was super happy for Jarin. We needed him to play well. He needs his confidence. He got his confidence going tonight. Hopefully we see his confidence at a really high level moving forward here in March.

Q. You had 80 possessions tonight. With Kentucky's depth situation, was there a certain number you wanted to get to?

NATE OATS: You know what, we like to get to 80. For whatever reason, the guys that run our analytics box score, two of 'em got the flu while we were here. We got some subs in. I don't have it in front of me. I don't know how many possessions we had; none of my analytics box scores in front of me because apparently our subs in the analytics were not as good as our subs in the game (smiling). I don't have it.

How many possessions was it?

Q. 80.

NATE OATS: Perfect. So we got to 80. That's what we like to get to, especially with a team that likes to run with us. Especially with their depth being as low as it was.

Q. How good was it to get Derrion back in for some game action?

NATE OATS: It was good. I mean, we knew he was going to be rusty. It's hard when you don't practice for a few weeks in a row. Only had a few practices. He's trying to attack Andrew Carr. Definitely got a few inches on him.

He had the good kick-out to Jarin in the corner. I thought he was able to get a little flow, knock some of the rust off. We were able to get him almost 10 minutes.

I was happy with the way he played. He didn't have a turnover. Got the one shot that he probably shouldn't have taken. He was able to get a couple rebounds, had an assist. He wasn't bad in his minutes.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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