

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 15, 2025

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

**Auburn Tigers**

**Coach Bruce Pearl**

**Johni Broome**

**Dylan Caldwell**

Postgame Press Conference



**How do you try to erase that going into the NCAA tournament?**

JOHNI BROOME: Well, now we're looking ahead to March Madness tournament. The first two we dropped, looking forward to the SEC tournament. It hurts but we have to learn from it, watch film. We'll try to get better going into the March Madness.

**Q. Dylan, they go on a run, they're up by double-digits. You fire right back. What was the key to settling down and getting back in the game like you did?**

DYLAN CARDWELL: First and foremost, glory to God and Jesus Christ.

Just buying into the scouting report really. The bigs being up the line, helping the guards on floppy. Just buying in at the end of the day.

I think got away from guarding in that scoring run. They got out in transition a lot. That run was on us, the one we gave up. We kind of went back to what we know, the scouting report. That's how we got our run back.

**Q. What happened at the end when you limped off?**

DYLAN CARDWELL: Just a cramp.

**Q. Johni, you played Tennessee now a few times. What stands out about them to you?**

JOHNI BROOME: They take pride in their defense. They make it hard to score. Yeah, they're a gritty team.

**Q. Dylan, going into probably some of your last games as an Auburn Tiger, talk about what goals you have left. You are in a strong position for the No. 1 overall seed. What is your message to your team?**

DYLAN CARDWELL: Heightened sense of urgency. My prayers and my thought is moving forward. I hope these three losses that we've had, we gave these games away. No one beat us, we beat ourselves.

Tennessee 70, Auburn 65

THE MODERATOR: We'll ask Coach Pearl for a couple of comments on the game, and then we'll take questions.

BRUCE PEARL: Well, I want to start off by congratulating Tennessee and their team and their coaching staff, their program, for advancing to the championship game of our tournament.

Tennessee is a great team. They play the right way. They're worthy of defeating us.

We have to do a better job defensively. The last time we played them, they scored 51 points. Tonight they scored 70. In particular, we fouled them too much. That's not a comment about the officiating. The officiating was fine. They scored 37% of their points at the foul line. That's on us.

We didn't convert some inside shots and some free throws and some things like that that you have to in order to win a close game.

But our guys are great competitors. I'm very, very proud of 'em. I believe that this team has from start to finish done enough to be the No. 1 overall seed in this tournament. Our résumé is historically one of the strongest résumés in the history of college basketball with the number of quad one wins we've had. Certainly losing to Tennessee as a team ranked fifth or sixth in the country is not necessarily shouldn't knock us off that spot.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Johni, three of the last four you have dropped.**



... when all is said, we're done.®

Having a sense of urgency moving forward into the tournament, knowing the next time, God forbid, we lose a game, we're going home. There's no more team meal, there's no more film, there's no more being a team.

Having that sense of urgency to continue the season, prolong the season, so we can spend more time as a family, as a unit. These are my brothers. I want to play until April 7th so I can have more time with my friends. Most importantly, make history. But just the greatest team I've ever been on. I don't want these guys to take it for granted. Boxing out, making free throws, layups, if that's what it's going to take to prolong our season, just buy in and have a heightened sense of urgency.

**Q. Johni, you're obviously tight with Tahaad. How do you make sure he keeps his head up for the post-season?**

JOHNI BROOME: Tahaad is a great player. He's a great teammate. He's a good friend. Just kind of give him words of encouragement. He's been amazing for us all year. He had a rough night tonight, which that's okay, though. His brothers have his back. That's on us.

He's going to bounce back and get ready for March Madness.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse you. We'll continue with questions for Coach Pearl.

**Q. Three of the last four, is this kind of a flush it, move forward? Is there panic at all?**

BRUCE PEARL: I'm really glad you asked me that question. We lost to Alabama, Tennessee and at Texas A&M. Yeah, we're panicked. That's a real softball.

We lost to some great teams. We lost at the buzzer against Alabama. We had possessions here. Yeah, we're panicked. I can hardly wait till next weekend to start playing again. Let's get to Sunday, find out where we're going, find out who we're playing and let's get back to work. I'm looking forward, not back.

**Q. It wasn't the strongest day at the free-throw line. What do you want to do better in that category?**

BRUCE PEARL: Yeah, in a close game, obviously it's important and we've done a great job winning a lot of close games this year, we've been really good at the foul line.

Johni did a great job inside, just dominating inside, earned those foul shots that he got. Obviously he struggled at the

free-throw line.

Tennessee was playing drop coverage. We had our point guards, Denver and Tahaad, were combined 1-10 from the three. Most of them were decent looks. We're usually going to make those. Johni had one assist, that's because we didn't bang shots we've normally made.

Tennessee's guards are elite. They're great, great guards. They do a great job of closing out a little quicker. That's back-to-back games where our guards, I think our guards were 5-20 against Tennessee and Auburn. We still managed to win.

Tonight obviously we just didn't shoot a good percentage. I thought we'd shoot better, play better offensively. I know we could not play much better defensively as we did at home, holding them to 51. Hold them to 70, you have a chance. Fouled too much.

**Q. You called your résumé historically strong. How much do you think tournament results should factor into this? Auburn won the whole thing last year and didn't move a seed line. This year do you feel like your body of work in the regular season was enough?**

BRUCE PEARL: They talk about the body of work as much as anything, the wins we had all season long, the strength of the league. We lost to a team that's fighting for a 1 seed.

Obviously I'm very proud of the SEC. Just incredibly proud to be a part of this tournament, to be a part of this league. These four teams that have made it to the championship game on Saturday, I don't know that historically has there been four stronger teams as far as nationally ranked teams ever in a Final Four of an SEC tournament? I can't imagine, not even close.

Yeah, it means a lot to us. In other words, to me, this is one of the things I've talked to the team about, if you're the No. 1 overall seed, then basically you had the best regular season from November all the way to March. We'd love to be able to hold onto that. We'll find out Sunday.

**Q. You guys only had three bench points. Tahaad struggled. How much of an impact did you feel like that had on the game? How do you keep Johni's confidence there?**

BRUCE PEARL: Yeah, for sure. I'll roll with Tahaad all day every day. He's played great. One of the most impactful freshmen in all of college basketball.

Tennessee is a tough cover, man. It's hard to cover those



guards. You get banged on those screens, you're chasing those guards off that floppy stuff, that's a lot. We never quite got into a rhythm for him.

Miles Kelly, being in deep foul trouble, that was a real factor in the second half because Miles has been one of our best defenders, he was our best shooter. He had four fouls, got his... He played probably 10 minutes less than he normally place.

**Q. There's a chance you could play Tennessee again. I'm sure you're not interested in giving away any sort of a scouting report. Generally speaking, where does Jordan Gainey fall in that?**

BRUCE PEARL: He made three buckets and he was 8-8 from the foul line. It's hard to defend him at the free-throw line.

He's a great competitor. He's a coach's son. He's a warrior. I know he's got a great affection for the Tennessee Vols and really does a great job representing their program both on and off the floor.

Obviously their guards, Zeigler is 9-9, Mashack was 6-8, Gainey was 8-8. We just had a hard time not fouling their guards.

**Q. You've talked before about Rick's teams playing the right way. Expand. Is that effort, toughness, schemes?**

BRUCE PEARL: It's character, it's culture. It's their faith. It's the men that are coaching them. Great coaches and great men.

I remember earlier in the year I talked about two or three of the games that I thought were some of the best games I've been involved in this year, was at Houston, when we played Tennessee, Florida. The games are physical because they're physical on offense, they're physical setting screens, they're physical defensively.

But when I say they play the right way, there's no issues. There's no extracurricular. You understand how they play. You respect how they play. They respect how we play. That's from their head coach.

**Q. Big strength of your team has been your bench all season long. Didn't get much from the bench today. Talk about your rotations, what you were seeing.**

BRUCE PEARL: Yeah, no, for sure. For sure. Our bench has been terrific and we play best when everybody contributes.

It's kind of become... We almost had seven starters in a sense that Tahaad and Chaney coming off the bench are just like starters. That's been a great, great strength for us all season long.

Chaney had a big game in Auburn against Tennessee. We probably offensively need to think about sharing it a little bit more. We run through Johni pretty consistently. May step back and see if we can spread out our scoring a little bit, then that might make us even more dangerous and an even better team.

**Q. You saw Duke and Houston earlier this season. How do these other three teams here in the semis stack up with those guys?**

BRUCE PEARL: Yeah, I mean, whether it be Houston or Duke, probably the two best teams outside of our league that we've played. I put them right in there with Florida, Tennessee, Alabama. They're right there. So there are five or six teams right there that have a chance to get to the Final Four.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports