

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 15, 2025

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Alabama Crimson Tide

Coach Nate Oats

Chris Youngblood

Mark Sears

Postgame Press Conference

Florida 104, Alabama 82

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Alabama. We'll take opening comments from Coach Oats, then go to questions.

NATE OATS: Obviously not one of our better games. Florida's a very good team. We want to be the hardest playing, toughest team on the floor. We were not today, particularly in the second half. Thought they made a lot of tough plays. Started out of the gate in the second half with the boards in the first possession. I don't think we competed hard enough on our rebounds. We didn't do a good enough job on defense.

They started the second half on a 17-5 run the first five and a half minutes. That's not what we expected out of this group. We're going to have to regroup, see how bad we want to try to make a run again in the NCAA tournament this year. We'll find out where we get sent, who our opponents are tomorrow. Try to regroup.

We did a pretty good job regrouping last year. I think we can make another run this year. But we're going to have to play a lot better than we did in the second half of this game.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players.

Q. How do you as veterans stop a 17-2 run like that, limit the damage?

CHRIS YOUNGBLOOD: Pretty easy, but it's not simple. Regroup. This is the SEC tournament. It's March. So at the end of the day, the things that caused the 17-2 run had nothing to do with basketball. Toughness, discipline,



playing hard, like coach said.

Q. Mark, what do you as a guard group need to do better to make sure performances like that doesn't happen again in the tournament?

MARK SEARS: We just got to continue to be just tough on defense. We got to do a better job of making shots easier on the offensive end.

Q. Mark, Coach Oats' point last year, last year similar situation, what is the going to be your message to the team to make sure a run in the Final Four happens?

MARK SEARS: We just have to regroup. Regroup. That's all we've got to do.

Q. Chris, what happened open the flagrant play?

CHRIS YOUNGBLOOD: Just simple play. Crashing the glass. Tried to do a swing move. My hands happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. It wasn't intentional.

Q. Y'all played the toughest schedule in the country this season. How does that prepare y'all for whoever you're going to face in the NCAA tournament?

CHRIS YOUNGBLOOD: It's ideal you play the toughest schedule. Whoever you face in March, have to win six tough games. We've done it before. All throughout the season, we had a pretty good season. Played a lot of tough teams. We'll be ready.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen. We'll continue with questions for Coach Oats.

Q. Could you give us any kind of an update on Nelson, what it might look like for him?

NATE OATS: He got the knee injury. I'm not exactly sure what it is. I don't think it's anything with an ACL or anything like that. Got to be evaluated by the team doctor at halftime. Let us know in the second half he wasn't going to be able



to go.

Hopefully we get him back for first round in the NCAA tournament. We were up one when he went out. Got scored 63-40 after that. It wasn't all him, but...

We were right in the game till he went out, so... I thought with the guys we had in the second half, we still should have been able to stay in the game, make a run, try to get the win without him. Obviously a lot tougher without him, especially the way he was playing to start the game out.

Q. What has Todd Golden at Florida really done against Alabama compared to other teams?

NATE OATS: Their backcourt is really good. They do a good job running us off the line. I mean, shoot, I think their starting backcourt had 54 points combined tonight. Ours struggled a little bit. I think we only had 26, so...

They've done a better job getting their guards going, open, than we have. They've done a good job running us off the line, pushing us into their shot-blockers. I don't think we made great rim decisions.

We didn't finish well at the rim. They shot 64% at the rim, we were only 52% at the rim.

Good shot blocking. We didn't make great reads. They've done a good job. I don't think we'll see them till maybe an Elite Eight or Final Four game, depending on where we all get placed.

They're good. They've had our number here for the last couple weeks. If we are fortunate enough to get a third crack, we're going to have to do some things different, that's for sure.

Q. With Selection Sunday tomorrow, what do you want to see tomorrow? What is your message wherever you go to your team?

NATE OATS: Yeah, I mean, it's the NCAA tournament. Only 68 teams that get in out of, what, 360-some Division I. We'll be one of the top eight, I would guess we'll be a 2 seed sent somewhere.

It will be set up for us to make a deep run again. We're going to have to do a little soul searching, see how bad we want to make a deep run.

I mean, the effort I saw in the second half wasn't what I would have liked to see going into the NCAA tournament, so... We're going to get back there, watch the selection show, figure out who the first opponent is, figure out who

the next two possible ones after that is, get to work as a staff on a scouting report.

Our players are going to have to really determine how bad they want to make a run 'cause it's truly player-led more than anything. With the effort and the toughness I saw the second half tonight, like, it's not going to get us very far.

I mean, I guess first round will be nice. We're going to see somebody that won a conference tournament in the first round. Then we're going to see somebody that's really good in the second round no matter who it is. It's going to be a 7 or 10 seed, would be my guess. Those are really good teams.

We're going to have to get our guys back, regrouped, trying to be the hardest, toughest playing team on the floor, because we were not tonight.

Q. What is the thought process in not calling a timeout during the 17-2 run? What's your overall philosophy? Do you like the players to work it out themselves?

NATE OATS: I told them, do you want me to call a timeout and tell them to play harder. We sat in the video room after the first time we played Florida. We said we're going to be the hardest playing, toughest team. It's not because we're tired. We can make up a lot of excuses. We played last night, they played last night. 15-minute break at halftime, they played harder than us. You guys got to determine whether you're going to play tougher or not.

Then you figure some stuff out, to be honest with you. They need to figure out whether they wanted to be the hardest playing, toughest team on the floor or not.

Q. Not the result you wanted today, but still a great season. You didn't get the result you wanted last time going into the NCAA tournament either. What was the key there? Can you lean on that? Do you think this team can be better than last year's?

NATE OATS: Yes, so last year I thought we were really on a slide. What, we lost three or four down in the tournament. Three or five because we won first round here and beat Auburn at Auburn.

In the Tennessee game, I thought we actually competed, played hard. That loss was on me more than on anybody.

I think we're close to being an elite team that can make another Final Four run. I don't know how many times we can play somebody, and basically the loss is because we didn't play hard enough. That's frustrating.



I think the lesson learned last year is we're not going to get anywhere being 110th, 112th ranked defense in the country. We're going to have to determine we're actually going to guard somebody.

We did for four straight games in the NCAA tournament. We played really good defense. We got everybody to buy into playing hard on the defensive end. Our defense was good enough to make a four-game run. We put together some pretty good scouting reports I thought that fit. We knocked off some pretty good teams.

Our defense wasn't great today, but it's been better. I thought yesterday it was really good. Kentucky is decimated, their personnel wasn't as good as maybe what we obviously saw today or maybe what we'll see in the second round of the NCAA tournament.

I thought our defense was good at Auburn. Thought our defense was really good at Tennessee. I'm not quite sure why it disappeared in the second half of tonight's game.

But we're going to face a little adversity in the NCAA tournament, go back to last year second round, playing Grand Canyon. They're good. They're tough. Things weren't going well. Dioubate came in, changed the entire trajectory of the game. Dang near won the game for us. We're going to have to have multiple guys that are capable of changing the trajectory of the game to making us the toughest, hardest playing group on the floor. I thought Mo was pretty good tonight. We chart the blue collar stuff, we were minus 15 in that department in the second half. We had 79, and Mo had 25 of the 79. Nobody else even had double-digits. We're going to have to get some other tough guys, hard-playing guys other than just Mo going into the NCAA tournament.

Q. Mark scored one field goal in the second half. Labaron only had one bucket he made the entire game. What is going to be your message to them with the importance of guard play in the tournament?

NATE OATS: Yeah, our starting backcourt, it scored 14. We got outscored 54-26 with the three starting guards from them and our three starting guards.

To me, though, it was more when you get locked into what you have to do to win a game, and you're really talented on offense, the offense takes care of itself a lot.

I go back to, like, what we said we were going to be. Were we the hardest playing, toughest team on the floor? Was our back court the hardest playing, toughest backcourt on the floor? If we were locked into the defensive end, we're playing off stops more, I think the offense comes a lot

easier.

Particularly in the second half, Labaron wasn't great on both sides of the ball for large parts of the game after he had an unbelievable game yesterday. I don't know if it's just fresh frustration, but we need to be better. We're going to rely on him to win games in the NCAA tournament.

They've got a tough backcourt. They're very good defensively, too. They got some of the best defensive guards in the country, as well. So they obviously did a good job with us.

I think we got to buy into just being tough on the defensive end and letting the offense take care of itself.

We had too many turnovers, blocked shots at the rim, poor rim decisions, in my opinion. I thought Mark was great moving the ball in the first half. I thought he got in. We didn't particularly hit all the shots. I thought he made a lot of really good reads in the first half. For whatever reason, we just as a group, the ball wasn't moving like it needed to in the second half.

Again, you go back to were we getting stops, are you playing off stops, are you taking the ball out of the net all the time. When you're locked into the defensive end, I think the offense kind of takes care of itself a lot of times.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

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