

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 16, 2025

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Tennessee Volunteers
Coach Rick Barnes
Jahmai Mashack
Jordan Gainey

Postgame Press Conference

Florida 86, Tennessee 77

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to begin with Tennessee. We'll ask Coach Barnes for thoughts on the game, then take questions.

RICK BARNES: Congratulations to Florida. They've had a great run here at the end of the year. Deserve to be SEC tournament champions. Again, congratulations to them.

If I look at it from a statistical standpoint, the fact that we just got out-rebounded the way we did, large number, that led to second-chance points, paint touches. That was huge obviously.

We had some breakdowns that we don't want to have at times. Really proud of our team this year to put ourselves in a position to head into the NCAA tournament with a chance to have a nice seed, get into the championship.

Obviously we get here, we like to win it. Again, give them credit. They got it done today. We're disappointed. We've got to get ourselves back, ready for next week.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Jahmai, does being able to make a run in this point in the best conference give you optimism that you can do that in the NCAA tournament, as well?

JAHMAI MASHACK: Yeah, of course. I've said it this whole time, throughout this tournament, I feel like the experiences that we've had has built us to be better at this point.

I think that through this game we've experienced a lot of



different situations. Through this whole regular season we've experienced a lot of different situations. That's getting us ready for March. We don't know who we're going to play, the play style, how their team is constructed.

The experience we've had, playing the best of the best in this conference is going to help us in March, and that's the biggest goal.

Q. I know neither one of y'all are big men. When you look at those rebounding numbers, it is what it is, what does that tell you? How tough was that battle?

JORDAN GAINNEY: Yeah, we knew it was going to be a dogfight. As soon as we saw we were playing Florida, and we appreciate it. It was tough. We just got to be better next time, and we'll learn from it.

JAHMAI MASHACK: Yeah, no, I definitely feel like that was something that we talked about a lot. I'm never going to blame anybody else. I'm always going to look at myself first. I think there were opportunities where I could get more rebounds. That's my job. That's what I do. I want to be an all-around player.

I think if I can get more rebounds, get some more opportunities, especially on the offensive glass, we can get some more shots up.

I think our bigs are going to learn from this. I think through this experience they're going to be even better. It's just sharpening their tools for later on.

Q. Three great games three days in a row. How are you feeling at this point? What do you need to get rested up mentally and physically?

JORDAN GAINNEY: Yeah, we'll be prepared and we're going to get recovered very well whenever we get back. We're just excited to see who we play, see where we go, get this thing rolling.

Q. Jordan, I know no matter how y'all get points in a game, it's just how many points the team gets. In

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games where for whatever reason Chaz is having a game where he doesn't put up a bunch, do you feel pressure to go out there and do more or is that just the way it's gone?

JORDAN GAINEY: No, I can speak for all of our guys, we don't really feel pressure in those moments because we put in so much work throughout the year to where we can be prepared for moments like this, prepared for the big stage. We're all ready to make the shot, make the necessary rebounds, do what we have to do on the defensive end.

We're all just always prepared for these moments.

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

Q. Obviously you mentioned it, but what is it about Florida that makes that rebounding so tough?

RICK BARNES: Well, I think they got the best front line in college basketball. You look at their depth. Not many teams have that. They've used it well.

I think those guys really understand what they need to do, how they need to play. They've got experience. But they've got quality depth there. They're big. They're mobile, agile. They do their jobs.

Q. You've been through different results in this tournament as it pertains to what happens now. Is there really a benefit in your mind either way to how things go here?

RICK BARNES: Well, the fact of the matter, win or lose, you got to have something to say about it, right? You have to come with your team, what you're going to lead them into.

Obviously when you're having a hard-fought game like we did yesterday, then a team against who has arguably played the best in the last three, four weeks of the season. They're an outstanding team.

Coming into this game, worrying about their front line. Everybody starts over. Who knows what happens. So many people try to analyze when you leave a tournament like this. All I can say is I'm really proud of this group. I think we got two guys that will be in a room that have been part of NCAA tournament on this team, being there in a selection showroom waiting to see your number. It's going to be new for everybody, for most of the team.

The fact is you spend a year building this program, this

team to where you want it. You got to trust it, believe in it. Win or lose today, you're going to stick to what you've done, make sure your guys go out. They'll be excited about it. We'll just stick with our process. That's what we'll stay with.

We'll go back, scrub this out a little bit. Even though it's over with, some of the mistakes we made today, it can't happen. I got three or four plays running through my head right now defensively that we gave up. Just a little bit out of character.

Again, I don't want to ever take away from the team that won because they have a lot to do with that sometimes. Sometimes we do have some self-inflicted wounds.

You can't give up 15 offensive rebounds to Florida, but it's easy to do. They're long. They get their hands on it. They're very good interior passing team with those guys. They pursue the ball. Those 50/50 balls, when they've got size on you, are a little bit harder to come up with.

But again, I'm proud of our team. You think about it. We were right here, right in the mix in the best league in the country. I think there's a bunch of teams in this league that feel like us. They get in that tournament, they got a chance to go really deep into it with a chance to win it.

Just like coming here, we came with the idea we wanted to win this tournament. Disappointed that we didn't. We get to go again next week. Hope that we can survive and keep moving on.

Q. Have you been through a grind close to this in terms of the nightly quality of teams and players? Do you think the teams in this league will benefit from that in the tournament?

RICK BARNES: You hope so because you really do. So many things go into that. The longer TV timeouts, sometimes gets you momentum going, a little bit longer. Those type of things.

Obviously all the attention that surrounds it. Each round, it grows if you can win. It's really a matter of your preparation, understanding respect. I told our team, anybody that's in this tournament, it tells you one thing: they're playing really well at the end of the year or they wouldn't be in the tournament. Or they've done enough to prove they belong in this tournament.

I've seen enough in my lifetime to see matchups, all those different things, come into play. It's what makes it the most special event in our country. We don't know because you're still dealing with young people for the most part.

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Again, I'm really proud of our team. Again, they've been a fun team to coach. I want more for 'em. I know they want more. I go back. Everybody says is it good to come in here, win a game and go home. You always want to win. I don't care. I just told them I would be disappointed if they weren't disappointed that we lost today because I know they felt we had a chance to win.

Because of what they've done, we get to play in March Madness. I want them to go and I want them to enjoy the experience. I know they want to win it as well as all of us. We want to win it.

Q. Going into this tournament, Zakai, Jahmai has the experience, Chaz. What are you getting out of Jordan Gainey right now? How much more confidence does that give you going into this thing?

RICK BARNES: I'm very confident in our team. I've seen us play... Again, I could sit here and say right now we just got beat by the best team in the country. It's a three-possession game. I can tell you come up with three or four things that we can't do. That's how fine a line it is. Even when we got down, we fought to get back in it.

That's how close it is. It is. But I'm proud of Jordan. What I told the team. You think about it. A year ago, two years ago, Jordan was upstate. He's come in and he's just worked so hard. He's playing with a great deal of confidence.

Yeah, I mean, I feel good. I'll tell you what I told our team. We just got to get more consistent on the front line. We're not the biggest team, but yet we've proven that when we beat this team, without Zakai. You go back and look at that game, it was the difference on the glass. They were able to come back and they got after it more. First time down there, we weren't very good at all. They spanked us good. We came back, again the difference was on the glass. 50/50 balls, those type things.

I think both teams are better right now than when we played in Knoxville a couple weeks back. But today, I mean, 15 offensive rebounds against these guys... They had the ability to put them back, draw fouls, which they did on some of those. So much of what they got done today came from those offensive rebounds.

I would say, too, it's probably the difference in the game.

Q. I think you got eight rebounds from your three bigs. What is the antidote for that?

RICK BARNES: We talked about it in the locker room. It's

them doing it. Again, it's hard. They went up against a very strong, physical, tall front line. Like I said, we did it earlier in Knoxville. I think Igor was out of that game. It's a major focus.

You can't be a great defensive team if you don't finish the possession by rebounding the ball. You can't. They're going to make some shots, make some difficult shots.

Again, you can't be a great offensive team if you can't get about 40% of your misses. I would assume today they got close to that or more. Right there, so many games are decided by rebounding. I mean, it's a huge part of what we emphasize. We didn't get it done today. All we can do is address it, which we already have. We'll continue to emphasize it in the next week.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

RICK BARNES: Thank you.

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