

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Auburn Tigers

Coach Steven Pearl

KeShawn Murphy

Kevin Overton

Postgame Press Conference



Auburn 77, Mississippi State 61

STEVEN PEARL: Obviously needed that one. I thought that was as good as our defense played in a while. 71 possessions, 61 points. That's what it's supposed to look like. Thought we did a good job of executing some of the new things that we were doing defensively. Ran ball screen covers we really hadn't done all year. Our guys did a really good job of executing. For the most part did a good job of getting their second-chance opportunities.

I thought we didn't let our offense dictate our defense in the first half. We weren't making open shots, and we still just continued to guard, continued to finish possessions. As the second half went on, we got into a little bit more of a rhythm and obviously were able to increase that lead.

Did a great job of beating a good team that knocked us off a few weeks ago. So proud of the guys. Did a good job.

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

Q. KeShawn, four of your teammates were in the scoring column plus 10. What does that show about your team's production, knowing you had four players in plus-10 territory?

KESHAWN MURPHY: Any night it could be anybody. We understood that. I'm just proud of these guys to come out with grit and heart, to be able to come out and win the game.

Q. KO, you're shooting over 50% these last few games. What has been the difference for you? How confident are you feeling?

KEVIN OVERTON: Just trusting my work. Shoot the same shots pretty much all the time. Again, just trusting my work. Fortunately they're going in right now.

Q. Kevin, you guys really seemed to limit No. 12's efficiency scoring-wise in the back court. Was there a change in terminology and play style within the second half from the first half?

KEVIN OVERTON: No. I think it was much of the same. I think maybe we just were a little bit more urgent maybe. Game plan was the same. Just limited opportunities more in the second half. First half was more one on one. Second half was more get him off the ball, so yeah.

Q. KeShawn, yesterday you said Coach says effort, and that was the big indicator of what he wanted you to do. During halftime, what did he tell you?

KESHAWN MURPHY: Honestly, we knew what we had to come out and fix. It was on us as players, not coaches. That played a big role in the performance we had in the second half. I'm glad we were able to stay together and make it happen. Last time it didn't go like that. That's a big step in our team.

Q. KO, I want to ask you about Murph and the start and finish he had.

KEVIN OVERTON: Besides the two fouls, in a heartbeat, he was tremendous. His energy is unmatched. I've never played with a big man with so much energy. He's just consistent. I'd say he's one of the main people on the team that matches my energy.

It was good to see. I wish he could have stayed out there longer. But good game for him.

Q. Murph, 15 and 9 on six of seven shooting. How important is that to you?

KESHAWN MURPHY: It's important to me. Most importantly, it was one of the coaches telling me to go out and be who I am, go out there, don't get into everything

else going on. Do what you do. That played a big role in my start to finish.

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

Q. Big difference on the defensive end for y'all from the first game. What was the big key that made the difference?

STEVEN PEARL: Yeah, just thought we did a better job of pressing into the ball and making him activate his dribble. He went 6 for 17 from two. I thought we did a good job of making him shoot more long-distance twos as opposed to letting him just line us up and shoot threes.

I thought we did a really good job of contesting his shots. In the first game, I thought we got disconnected a few times and he got some clean ones. He may have gotten one clean one tonight. I think for the most part our guys did a good job kind of executing the game plan.

He goes 8 for 25, Epps goes 6 for 16. Guys did a good job on their guards, limiting what they do well. We did a pretty good job of finishing possessions.

Q. What do you like about bringing Blake into the game? What does he add to the team?

STEVEN PEARL: Yeah, I mean, he understands what we're doing defensively at a high level. He's got to play nine to 14 minutes in this game just because we need guys like Tahaad and KO a little more fresh at the end of the game.

I thought in the first Mississippi State game, those guys were out there for so long, we kind of took possessions off late. That's when we got burned. I thought it was really important 'cause Blake's nine minutes, Tahaad only has to play 29. I thought in the second half Tahaad was really good because he was more fresh than in games past.

He communicates. He understands the scouting report inside and out. He made his free throws. Was happy to see him be aggressive and put up a three.

Played great one-on-one defense. Does a lot of those things that impact winning.

Q. You start out hot in the second half. What did you tell your guys that fueled the fire in the second half?

STEVEN PEARL: Yeah, at halftime the message was more we got to stay consistent defensively. Our offense wasn't great in the first half. But we were getting really

good looks. I think as long as you don't let your offense affect your defense, those shots will eventually fall.

Obviously in the second half, they did. We scored I think 49 points in the second half. Guys did a good job of trusting. They got off to a quick start. They had a wide-open layup, then hit a three in transition to push it up to nine. I thought our guys did a great job responding and getting back into the lead. Went on a nice run.

Q. You talk about Elijah, 10 rebounds in that game. What impact did he have?

STEVEN PEARL: Yeah, he started off the game a little slow, a little hesitant. He did a really good job of responding. I thought he was good in the second half. 10 rebounds, three big offensive rebounds and seven defensive rebounds. That's what he's capable of. He's such a great athlete. He does a good job of high pointing the ball and getting rebounds.

I told him, Listen, great job. You did that against Mississippi State. I need you to do that tomorrow against the toughest rebounding team in college basketball, Tennessee.

He stepped up in the challenge. We'll see. He did a great job of responding. He got off to a slow start. I thought he did a good job getting back.

Q. How were you able to calm down Murph after seeing how good he was on offense?

STEVEN PEARL: I thought it was funny because he said, The coaches told me not to get involved, be myself. Two minutes into the game he gets a T (smiling).

Obviously that game meant a lot to Murph, especially after what Hubbard did to us in the first game. It was great to see him get off to such a great start offensively. Made a midrange jump shot, then banged a three.

Obviously it would have been great to have him out there the rest of that half because he obviously was in a rhythm, he was feeling himself a little bit. But he's got to be smarter in those situations and not put us in a tough spot.

But nine rebounds, 15 points, four big steals, two big blocks. He had a couple really nice rotations where he got vertical at the rim. That's something we've struggled to do this year. Murph and Filip both made really nice plays when they had an advantage going to the rim.

Murph played well. He's got to stack another one tomorrow.

Q. Tennessee tomorrow. What is the message to the team about Tennessee?

STEVEN PEARL: I mean, they punked us the first time. Offensive rebounds and duck-ins were the two areas they absolutely destroyed us. We fouled too much.

They're going to challenge your toughness, your manhood. You got to respond and answer the bell tomorrow because tomorrow's going to be a fight.

That's what the game comes down to. They do such a good job using their physicality and big bodies to lean on you and wear you out during the game. Our guys have to step up to the challenge and understand they have to show a different level of toughness this time around to beat a really good Tennessee team.

Q. We talked about the turnovers. You only had seven tonight, 15 assists. What was the difference and how much did you like the way there were some buckets that had some good ball movement?

STEVEN PEARL: Yeah, we just were way more composed with the ball. They do a good job of denying catches on the wing and being physical with their framing. I thought we handled it pretty well.

We only had five assists in the first half and we had 10 in the second. Obviously when you make shots, that helps. I thought we got a lot of the same clean looks in the second half. We just did a good job of knocking them down.

We had two casual turnovers of the seven. I thought the rest of them were us trying to be aggressive. That obviously helps our offense when we're not letting them get out in transition and go.

Q. You did a really good job limiting Hubbard's efficiency in the second half. Was that a point of emphasis at all coming in at halftime?

STEVEN PEARL: Did you watch the first game (smiling)? You did not. Well, he had 45 the first time. He made nine threes in the first half.

To answer your question, yeah, it was obviously important. In the first half, he had a lot of his points in transition. I thought we did a better job in the second half of getting to his right hand. In the first game he got downhill four times going to his right. I thought we did a better job in the second half of building a wall in transition and not letting him get downhill.

But yeah, I mean, I thought our guys did a good job. They understood that in order for us to beat that team, we had to limit what he was capable of doing. I thought we did a really good job overall. He only made two threes. When you don't have those eight extra ones in there, you have a chance to win the game (smiling).

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

STEVEN PEARL: Thank you.

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