

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Ole Miss Rebels

Coach Chris Beard

James Scott

AJ Storr

Postgame Press Conference

Ole Miss 76, Texas 66

THE MODERATOR: We are ready to begin with Ole Miss. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach Beard.

CHRIS BEARD: Obviously a good win for our team. Survive and advance mode obviously. A lot of respect for the opponent. Sean has done a good job in his first season there. Wish those guys the best of luck in the NCAA tournament. He's got good enough players to make a run.

For our guys, it's captain obvious. A season through a lot of adversity. Didn't get a lot of breaks. Didn't create a lot of our own breaks. For these guys to be playing this hard and this connected not only today in the SEC tournament but really the last couple weeks of the season I think is a sign of their character and the way they were raised.

Just super appreciative of our players continuing to fight. I thought today was a great example of how our team can play when we play well.

Everyone ends up in the situation that we're in now, survive and advance. Must win to extend your season. For a lot of teams it will be next week, the 68 teams that are fortunate enough to be in the NCAA tournament. But we're still alive.

We didn't come here to Nashville to win one game. We came here to win one game at a time. Still have belief in our locker room that we can make a run here.

Good things today. Really poised in the ultimate win-or-go-home situation.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for players.



Q. James, the stats gave you three blocks tonight. This was a big part of it. What made the defense so good for you tonight?

JAMES SCOTT: What made the defense so good was everybody was on the same page with the scout. We tried to take it possession by possession. I was just trying to protect the rim. The guards were doing a really good job of just (indiscernible).

Q. AJ, Matas Vokietaitis was a big, clear indicator of winning on y'all's last matchup. What was y'all's mentality going in here on shutting him down?

AJ STORR: Just trying to make it hard for him around the rim, sending multiple people at him. He's seven foot. Sending multiple people at him, trying to get him in foul trouble. That's pretty much it.

Q. Texas cut it to three late. Malik had the foul trouble. Previously this season there have been some times where those games get away from you. Tonight you dominated the last couple minutes. Take me inside those couple minutes, what you were thinking.

AJ STORR: It was just players making plays. I think Ilias made some plays down the line. James got a big alley-oop. I got downhill a couple times. That's really what it was, is players making plays down the stretch.

JAMES SCOTT: I mean, we just learned from our mistakes throughout the year this. This time we just didn't make the same mistakes that we made throughout the year.

Q. Like Coach Beard said, there's an automatic bid at the end of this tournament. How motivating is that for you?

AJ STORR: Just looking at it one game at a time. That's all you really got to do, look at it one game at a time.

JAMES SCOTT: Same thing that Coach said, one game at

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a time.

Q. I talked to Chris yesterday, and he told me about the ability to stay focused and not have any cracks in the foundation. There were a lot of moments that felt familiar. Tonight it was different. Was it something in the huddle or something you said on the floor to each other? What made the difference tonight?

AJ STORR: I think it was just our ability to just show. We just made plays.

JAMES SCOTT: Like AJ said, players made plays. Coaches gave us confidence and stuff in the huddles to make the plays.

Q. How are you feeling about this win? Are you extra hopeful?

CHRIS BEARD: That's just these two dudes, man (smiling). Good luck getting these two riled up.

AJ STORR: I'm glad we still alive. At the end of the day, that could have been my last game in my career, college career. I'm glad we still alive. Now we got to focus on the next one.

Q. You had four players in double figures. How important is it to have such a deep rotation?

AJ STORR: It just elevates our team when everybody chip in on that side, on the defensive side, too.

Q. It took Texas three or four minutes to get a bucket. Felt like they were not comfortable. What was it team-wise that you had a mentality of shutting them down early?

JAMES SCOTT: I mean, everybody was just talking on defense, everybody knew what's at stake in the game. Everybody just came out with a different mindset at the start of the game, you've got to throw the first punch.

AJ STORR: Yeah, we was just communicating. We knew the game plan. Gap defense a lot. They didn't really have a lot of driving lanes all the time. Yeah, we was just communicating.

Q. What do you feel was the biggest difference in the second half?

AJ STORR: Looking for free throws.

Yeah, we did pretty good making free throws. Let me see. We shot 44% from the field second half, so... We made

shots.

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

Q. What was your perspective on your interior defense?

CHRIS BEARD: I think several things. Off the top of my head, the guy to my right, James, had one of the best games he had all season. Protected the rim. Got positive contribution, Corey Chest. Klafke, undersized, made some tough plays in the second half in the paint.

I thought the guys did a good job executing a multi-layered game plan. Fortunate on our side of him getting in foul trouble that kept his minutes to where they normally are.

I think you got to give our guys a lot of credit for executing the game plan.

Q. In the past it seems like you ran out of steam during the end of the games. What changed, if at all?

CHRIS BEARD: Where did you get that sports coat?

Q. Goodwill in Oxford.

CHRIS BEARD: I like it. When you get things at Goodwill, do you get them dry cleaned or let's roll?

Q. Let's roll.

CHRIS BEARD: I respect that, yeah. I like that sports coat. I don't have many things that are pink, but I think I should. I had a pink tie one time. Never had the balls to wear it. I respect that.

What was your question?

Q. The defense lagging in the past. Today you showed out. What changed?

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, like no coaching speak here. This will sound really simple, but we're obviously in survive and advance mode. We all understand that.

Despite what people might think in our win/loss record that is hard to look at, we were actually having a lot of fun. We don't want the season to end. We want one more practice, one more film session, one more meal together. So today during the stretch run, I think Texas hit like back-to-back threes.

This has been an issue all year long. I think in some of

those last timeouts we were literally just having a conversation, just telling the guys to breathe a little bit, extended timeouts in the post-season. Guys, we got to get some stops down there. Trying to get some more player voice in our huddles.

We all agreed on the ball screen coverage.

I would say to answer your question, there's a little bit of calmness, just a little bit of focus. We didn't want to leave Nashville tonight. We're just trying to live for one more day together.

I've said it before, a lot recently, but I do respect these guys. I'm enjoying coaching 'em. We did not have the regular season that any of us would have liked to have. But now we're in March. Everyone is going to find themselves in the same situation we are right now. 68 teams are blessed to be in the situation next week.

It all comes down to win or go home. I think our guys did a good job not only today but yesterday, this morning, just kind of embracing it. We weren't afraid of the moment. We just said, Hey, if we're going to go out, we're going to go out on our terms.

Late in the game in our huddles, we were imploring the guys to try to get a defensive stop together.

Q. The way pieces fit tonight, was that some of what you envisioned when you were putting this team together last spring?

CHRIS BEARD: Trying not to think that way right now. But obviously what could have been. 99.9% of my focus right now is we got a chance to play tomorrow.

But your question is valid. Tonight it seemed like we had a good rotation. Every player that played for us made a positive contribution to the game. Give our players all the credit. I thought tonight was one of our better team efforts, obviously against a good opponent, a team that's going to be playing next week.

Q. You have to play in less than 24 hours against Georgia. How do you put this one behind you and look ahead to tomorrow?

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, we've got a process that we believe in. We've had some success in tournament play over the years. So we have some things we believe in. We're going to try to hydrate before we leave this building. We're going to get back and we're going to fuel, have a good meal. We're going to give the guys a couple hours to get off their feet. We're going to encourage our guys to

turn off your phone and live in the moment of March, watch some games on TV.

Later on this evening we'll introduce our opponent that we've already played once this year. We'll value rest more than basketball hours, practice and preparation. This plan has been good to us over the years. We'll try to execute it tonight.

Q. The one three-pointer made jumps out to me. What do you make of that stat?

CHRIS BEARD: I think our defense was good in segments of this game. I thought our guys did a good job not settling tonight. We still got some midrange shots that we like, but not the contested ones that we don't like so much. We had some guys with the courage to drive the ball to the basket. We had some timely plays, players making plays, that AJ says so eloquently.

Three-point shot wasn't our friend tonight. I think Travis Perry got two or three really good looks. He's normally going to make half of those. For our guys to win on this stage with this pressure of the reality of what this game means to us, to be beat a quality opponent not hitting any threes, I think shows our guys played well tonight.

Q. You've been complimentary of Texas a couple times. Having seen that team twice this season, what about them makes you believe they're one of those 68?

CHRIS BEARD: I think their résumé speaks for itself in the SEC. My confidence that they could have a nice NCAA tournament, Sean knows what he's doing, he's done it with multiple teams. I think they got really good players.

The NCAA tournament, in my opinion, comes down to matchups. I think Texas has some players that can lead them to a second weekend.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

CHRIS BEARD: Thank you.

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