

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 12, 2026

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Missouri Tigers

Coach Dennis Gates

Mark Mitchell

T.O. Barrett

Postgame Press Conference



Kentucky 78, Missouri 72

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Missouri. Coach will give an opening statement, then we'll take questions.

DENNIS GATES: Yeah, extremely proud of our group. Proud of our team. We may not have gotten off to a great start. Obviously Kentucky had a home-court advantage here in the conference tournament. But their fans showed up, created an environment where we had to kind of get through the little wrinkles that stopped us, turnovers being the most important. Once we got settled into the game, I thought we were able to get some things going.

Shawn Phillips' intensity, Mark Mitchell's intensity, T.O. Barrett's intensity is what led us.

Would love to have some possessions back, but you can't. Obviously here we are. We'll be waiting our fate to see what the Selection Committee says.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for players.

Q. We were talking to Trent in the locker room. He was saying the first half was a lot of small things. What did you see in that slow start?

MARK MITCHELL: Yeah, I think just some of the turnovers, some of the miscues maybe on defense. I think the turnovers gives them life when you're playing a game that's almost like a road game. Can't do things like that. That's two games in a row we let a team get a little bit of life.

Just little things like that.

T.O. BARRETT: Yeah, just kind of what Mark said. The turnovers kind of gets them going. When we have turnovers and they see shots falling, it kind of gets them going. We just got to be sharper coming out the gate.

Q. With this last three-game stretch, four days, how will you manage the pressure and uncertainty of the NCAA tournament?

T.O. BARRETT: I think we'll be just fine. Something that we can't control. We're just going to be ready.

MARK MITCHELL: Yeah, it's out of our hands, out of our control. We played two really good teams, three really good teams, the last three games, so...

I mean, what happens happens.

Q. T.O., from your perspective, Jayden was talking about how Shawn and Mark have been steady presences. What have they provided?

T.O. BARRETT: Speaking up, leadership. Getting everybody going when we're down in a slump. Kentucky went on a run, they were up 11. We had Shawn in the huddle, cheering everybody on. You can always look to them in situations like this.

Q. You tied your career high today, set a new career high. What has been the commonalities between the last two games that allowed you to have success, then the 23 points in the second half?

MARK MITCHELL: I think the game (indiscernible) a little different. Last game was a little more cleaner. I think in the first half I actually saw some shots I could have got more balance, got to my spots a little better. Second half, I was just trying to win the game. I don't think I knew how many points I had. My teammates was helping me. Shawn was sealing down there really well. When you get in a rhythm, see some shots fall, it helps you. I was just trying to win.

Q. What kind of inspired you about the comeback?

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MARK MITCHELL: I think it shows our fight, shows who we are. I think the last two games we probably been winning at least 50-plus minutes of the game. We keep getting these little lulls that we need to stop doing.

The last two games, fight, toughness, showing we're not going to go away. Clean little things, we're right there.

T.O. BARRETT: Not a lot of inspiration. It's win or go home now. Back against the wall. We're just fighting. We're just fighting, man. We just really don't want to lose.

Q. I think this is the first time all year you've lost three games in a row. What is it going to take to bounce back from this?

T.O. BARRETT: The film sessions we have. We always go back and look at what we did wrong, things we can get better at. We're pretty good at bouncing back. I'm confident in that.

MARK MITCHELL: Yeah, just seeing what we need to work on from an internal standpoint. Not getting too down on losses, more just the process rather than the result.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, players. You're dismissed. We'll continue with questions for Coach Gates.

Q. Can you walk us through the final three minutes.

DENNIS GATES: Just walking you through it, I'll have to look at the film to kind of be accurate.

But it went so fast. I do know once we got the lead, we can't put ourselves in a situation where the next possession or whichever possession they earn a foul shot away from the rim. That is where I think that was the last time we had the lead.

We didn't win the game. But you can't fault our guys. They did a great job fighting back to be able to be in this environment, and be down, but also show the poise that they've shown to catch the lead again. I wish we would have had the lead for more duration of the game than just 45 seconds.

Hard-fought game on both sides. I hope players continue to be allowed to make plays. I thought that foul call, but the other one, Mark can't put his shoulder in somebody's chest I guess.

Q. The last time these two teams played, it was a very similar comeback situation. What's the difference between the team y'all played in January versus

tonight?

DENNIS GATES: Well, at the end of the day they were able to make some plays late once we got the lead again. Self-infliction. We didn't make the same mistakes that they made at home. I think we forced them into three turnovers in that last three or four minutes. Now the foul is a turnover where we ended up giving them or gifting them two free throws. I think we had another turnover in that.

Ultimately you got to protect the basketball. No self-infliction. Be able to execute down the stretch.

Q. It felt like the game shifted pace quite often. How do you feel that affected the way your guys played?

DENNIS GATES: The game actually did. I mean, that's a good point you bring out. You have to look into the plays that actually allowed them to shift, so to speak.

When it shifted back to Kentucky, what play was it that allowed it to shift? You guys know, you were there. You need to be able to check it out and write about it. It was definitely a shift, so to speak (smiling).

Q. From a basketball standpoint, how difficult or frustrating is it the way Mark is playing right now to not be rewarded with wins?

DENNIS GATES: It's a journey of it. First of all, Mark is very unselfish. He would rather score zero points and get the win. I'll start with that right away. That is what it's about. We have a great player on our roster. He does what he needs to do to put his team in position.

The individual performances, Mark doesn't care about it at all. I thought he did what he had to do ultimately. Still some baskets that were I guess not counted in a 32.

Q. I noticed whenever I've covered your games during player introduction, you always stand across from the team. Could you explain why you do that.

DENNIS GATES: You must be a stalker (laughter).

No, I stand there, man. I just kind of get into an angle of the court where I'm able to see everything. That's all. Get away from the players, allow them to have their space. Try to shake hands with staff, our staff, then opposing staff, referees. I just try to get a glimpse of an angle that I will never have during the game. Just take in the environment. Once that happens, your senses calibrate and then you're able to think what you need to think as a coach.

It's nothing to read into it. It's just my space. That's all.

Q. What exactly do you think went into the slow offensive first half?

DENNIS GATES: The slow offensive first half? Turnovers. When you have four turnovers that early in the game, that leads to baskets for the opposing team. They only had probably in that first seven or eight minutes two baskets, two or three baskets, in the halfcourt. But we gifted some points in the paint based off our turnovers. We gifted fast break points. Obviously you can't put yourself in a situation like that where they're unearned opportunities.

That's the obvious score. It seems just because they scored that our offense wasn't excellent. Our offense was okay. Our mistakes came from the points off turnovers that they earned.

Ultimately we got to the foul line a little bit. I thought Mark ended up shooting only seven in a very physical game. He's one of the best in the country at drawing fouls. Seven is definitely not up to his standard or up to my standard. He wasn't able to get to the line early on in that game to sort of seal some of those possessions for us.

Q. Looking ahead just a little bit, you mentioned waiting to see what the committee says. Could you give a 30-second elevator pitch to the committee, what would it be?

DENNIS GATES: It's not an elevator pitch. It's just facts. We're in one of the best conferences in basketball. One of 36 teams with five Quad 1 wins. We don't have a bad loss at all. There's no bad loss on our record, meaning Quad 3s and I guess 4s.

We have some great wins at home and on the road. We just lost to a top, what, 25 or 30 team. But the NET doesn't look at where our team is. The NET doesn't say Trent Pierce was out and Jayden Stone was out. It doesn't say that. We're a completely different team than whatever the NET is talking about.

That's why the committee doesn't focus on the NET. Wins above bubble is there. Our style of play is there. I think we're a completely different team just because of the fact that we are a little bit more healthy. When you add Trent Pierce, our matrix is completely different than when you take him out. The same with Jayden Stone.

What is that, the Torvik rating? I think we're 35, 36 in that. So ultimately they got the job to do. I'm not on the committee. Everything that's been published right now in media is not accurate information based off of inside that room. So their educated guess based off the history. I

hope we have a shot, but we'll see. We'll see.

Q. Your thoughts on Shawn Phillips today. Got into foul trouble. What were your thoughts on his overall game?

DENNIS GATES: Shawn Phillips got in foul trouble in the first two minutes of the game, right? He still played some major minutes for us, specifically 18. When he was on the court, you guys saw the domination. You guys saw it. He was behind us emotionally. He was behind us mentally. He challenged his team in the huddle and they responded a certain way.

I would have loved the fact if he never got that last one. But do you pull a guy back and say don't play with the passion that you're playing with because everyone else plays the game at a lower passion than you do, or do you let that kid just try to will his team to victory.

I am absolutely proud of Shawn Phillips, his impact, his leadership. I am thankful that he chose me as his coach. I am thankful of his teammates accepting who he is as a young man, as a brother, as a peer.

But there is no doubt in my mind not having him in the first half impacted the game greatly. I even played him with two fouls. We just got to look and see if those were actual fouls or not. I don't know. You can't go back and change 'em. Referee saw something.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

DENNIS GATES: Thanks. MIZ.

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