

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 12, 2026

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Ole Miss Rebels

Coach Chris Beard

Travis Perry

Malik Dia

Postgame Press Conference



Ole Miss 76, Georgia 72

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Ole Miss. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach Beard.

CHRIS BEARD: We just wish Georgia the best of luck in the NCAA tournament next week. Quality opponent. Mike does a good job all the time, every year.

Great win for our program. Obviously survive and advance mode for us. We live to see another day.

I think the basketball, Texas yesterday, Georgia today, two of the best offenses in all of college basketball. We played probably three and a half halves of the best defense we played all year long. Kind of started yesterday with our defensive effort against a top 10 defense. Today Georgia, one of the highest scoring offenses in the country.

I thought our guys were dialed in. First half defense was about as well as it could be. Second half, like all good teams, we knew Georgia was going to get aggressive. A lot of our misfortune was self-inflicted.

I just want to recognize the guys did a really good job the last five, six minutes of the game. Obviously Georgia had a lot of fouls to give at that point. Their defense was super aggressive. I thought for the most part we were really good with ball security in the last three or four minutes. Again, wish Georgia the best. Really proud of our guys.

We set this up as a four-team tournament. We won the first one. We'll get back, get recovered as best we can, then tomorrow we'll start the next four-team tournament.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players.

Q. Travis, when the lead in the second half got up to 23 early, then what felt like a blink was down to two, who were the guys leading the team in that moment?

TRAVIS PERRY: Yeah, I mean, I feel like it was kind of -- obviously that's a huge blow. You're up 23, you look up, they're starting to hit a lot of threes.

I don't feel like we really were too blindsided by it. They're a great team. They shoot the three well, play very fast. Only a matter of time till they busted open a little bit. So we kind of knew it was coming.

I feel like it was a group, everybody in the huddle was talking to each other. Coaches were doing a good job of keeping us calm.

I think Ilias and Kezz, being the good ball handlers they are, being able to just get fouled in those moments, AJ making some clutch baskets down the stretch, having Malik playing the way he was, it really didn't need to be said that much. The huddles were all connected. Everybody knew if we wanted to keep playing, we had to win. That was the mindset, play hard and keep doing what we were doing.

Q. Malik, Georgia goes on that huge run, but still they never took the lead. How were you guys able to stave that off? Now you're 2-0, what do you want the nation to know about this team going into Selection Sunday?

MALIK DIA: Yeah, we had a lot of poise. Throughout the season we've been in that situation a good amount. I feel like we're finally starting to break through in these clutch moments. In these huddles, not much was said. I mean, it was a team effort. Just stay calm, stay poised and get it done.

As far as Selection Sunday, this team's fighting each and every game. We're taking it one game at a time. We just don't want our season to end. We want to be in the Big Dance.



Q. Travis, a lot of Kentucky fans are still cheering for you. It had to be a difficult decision for you to leave. How does a game like tonight validate your decision?

TRAVIS PERRY: Yeah, I mean, it's always good to have support. Kentucky fans travel well to Nashville.

The mindset is always to go out there and play for my teammates. I'm really happy where I'm at. I'm really happy playing with Malik every day, playing for Coach Beard. The mindset is to come out there and figure out a way to help my team win.

That's something that probably makes my mom really happy over there hearing that stuff. But for me, I'm just focused on trying to do anything I can to help us win.

Q. Travis, obviously you have a reputation as a shooter. Some of the other elements of your game, the rebounding, two assists as well. How does your overall game this year develop?

CHRIS BEARD: Six rebounds.

TRAVIS PERRY: I think that's something I've continued to try to work on. There's been ups and downs this season with that. I talked with Coach Beard right before we came down here. We knew what the mission was, we want to win one game at a time.

For us to win, I feel like I had to come out there and do more than just shoot the ball. You're not always going to shoot the ball well. So just trying to impact the game any way I can. They've been on me all year about being a little bit more nasty, a little bit more physical all around the game. I feel like tonight I finally got a good bruise from Somto there. That helped a little bit for my case of being nasty.

But that's just been the main thing, just trying to impact the game without scoring the ball.

Q. On the first one, you raised your hands up? Was that relief to see one go down?

TRAVIS PERRY: It was. Ilias always used to do that celebration when he finally hit one, back to our pre-season game. I kept telling everybody I was going to keep shooting 'em. I told Max Smith and Zach Day down there they needed to watch. When one finally went in, my hands were going to be high for a while. That was relief, and also they were stretching the lead out a little bit.

Q. Malik, you picked up where you left off after last night. How big is that for you and the team in general

to get off to such a quick start? How does that help you and the team?

MALIK DIA: It's really good. I mean, just going one game at a time. Obviously when the season is on the line, you're going to play with a little bit different intensity. I think that's what we've been doing.

As far as myself, I just don't want to go home. I just want another day. I want another moment with these guys. I'm just going to keep playing my heart out for them.

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

Q. Today your largest lead was 23 with 13 minutes to play. We saw the crumble, saw the falloff. What do you think prepared yourself and the team the most to finish strong?

CHRIS BEARD: That's a good question.

Definitely had some self-inflicted things during that -- crumble is your word. I wouldn't disagree with that. Give credit to the opponent. Georgia got super aggressive. The press heated us up a little bit.

I think in terms of our guys just having the poise, I mean, we're just in the mode now where we're trying to extend our season.

Fortunately or unfortunately, whichever way you look at it, we've been in some situations similar to this this season. We've been in almost every game. Just haven't come through like we did tonight more times than not.

I think we relied back on some of our past experience. I think our coaching staff did a good job tonight during the storm, just kind of weathering it. We had some contributions from different players. Klafke came in, made some plays. Kezza finished the game. It was really a team effort that pulled it through for us.

Q. I saw when Travis was answering a question earlier, he talked about being nastier on the court. You nodded your head. What has that process been like?

CHRIS BEARD: Travis Perry is a sophomore in college basketball. Played a role last year at his previous school. The idea for him at Ole Miss was to play a bigger role.

Travis is not a soft player. He's a physical guy. He's a competitor. But in the game of basketball, there's going to be plays and possessions where you have to play with that kind of strength.

We've been encouraging Travis from one day to initiate the contact, don't run from it. I think tonight's stat with him getting six rebounds speaks for itself. Obviously he took a big-time pop there on the flagrant.

No, Travis has got some nasty in him. It's just kind of a deal where we're trying to pull it out of him slowly but surely.

Q. Your team attempted a lot fewer threes than the first half. Did Cyril's ejection have any influence in your dynamic going into the second half because they have fewer bodies, less bigs on the front court?

CHRIS BEARD: I think that would be more so a question from them. It appeared to me they were guarding the three-point line really well early. It is a strength of our team. We were having a hard time getting open looks. Got Travis loose a few times on sets.

In the second half, it loosened up a little bit. Whenever you're playing against that kind of desperation defense, they had fouls to give. They were very aggressive. They were putting two on the ball. I think we had some timely three-point shots with the spacing.

When both teams got just tired during that two-minute stretch, I didn't want to call a timeout because I knew we might need them later on with the press that Georgia is so good at.

That was some ugly basketball there for a while with all the fatigue. I think during that stretch, we were able to get some threes, as well.

Q. When you come into a tournament like this needing to win five games in five days, do you feel there's maybe a chip on your shoulder going in? How do you feel your confidence grows when you win? There's a much more realistic pathway to a championship on Sunday.

CHRIS BEARD: Our big thing is we've tried to tap into our NCAA tournament experience. We're not viewing this any different. This is our survival and advance moment.

Like I said yesterday, and again earlier, everybody finds themselves in this position. It will start for 68 teams, starting on, what, Tuesday or Wednesday with the play-in games. That's the mode we're in now.

Not a lot of conversation about winning this tournament to get a bid. We're just trying to win the next game on the schedule. But we understand that we're in survive and

advance mode.

We started watching the Jimmy V Survive and Advance 30 for 30 last week. We watch about eight-minute segments throughout the day with our team, trying to get them to tap into this moment.

This is really where you don't want to have any regrets. It would be nice to play your best basketball, but that's not always possible. What we want to do is mentally just make sure we don't have any regrets mentally to understand this is where we are, we're trying to extend our season. No different than when we play in the NCAA tournament. Really we're following that game plan this week.

Our NCAA tournament just came a week early.

Q. I remember you telling us last year how you knew very early on that that team was going to be very good, probably in the pre-season. Is there anything about this team that shows you they can probably make a run here?

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, I think so, for sure. It's obviously been a challenging season with a lot of adversity. I'm not really thinking about that now. But I never shy away from the idea of my biggest belief, the thing that I'll always remember about this team, is that these guys have not quit. A lot of people that haven't seen our play this year in person that are here in Nashville see that. Beginning yesterday against Texas, a really good team, today Georgia, an NCAA tournament team.

You see it. It's not always pretty. We're not perfect. But our guys don't quit. You saw it in all different varieties today. The start, the defense, the lead, things are kind of falling apart on us. Zero quit. I will always respect that about this group of 15 players. It's been an up-and-down journey. But these guys continue to play for Ole Miss.

I know I'm proud of 'em. I know our fan base is proud of 'em. That's what I'll always remember about this team.

We'll have to have that same ingredient tomorrow. We'll have to have some belief, some championship DNA tomorrow. I'm confident we'll show up to play.

Q. Do you keep the process for preparing for tomorrow the same as yesterday? What are your keys especially with how Georgia plays?

CHRIS BEARD: We're going to switch it up a little bit. We normally go back to the hotel to have that good meal. Tonight we're going to go to Halls steakhouse. James used to live in Charleston. The Halls brothers are friends

of mine. One of the best restaurants in the country. We told the guys if we got it done tonight, we'd go to Halls, all the way down to where Kezza was hitting the last free throw we really needed.

From a coaching standpoint, do you talk to the guy, not talk to the guy, call a timeout, tell him to get off the line, do you trust the feel. To me it's always a game-time decision.

But on that one I did pull Kezz off the line. I said Kezz, look, a big shot here. I really want that shrimp cocktail here in about 45 minutes. Shout-out to Halls, helping us get the victory tonight. And shout-out to Kezz, stepping up and making the biggest free throw of the season.

Q. When things kind of shifted there in the second half, you could feel it in the building, a lot of people were looking for maybe a timeout or something. You let them play. What is it about this team that gave you the confidence in that moment to let things unfold?

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, I think, first of all, from a coaching standpoint, I think it's my responsibility to have timeouts late in the game, especially when you're playing a team like Georgia who has one of the best defensive presses in college basketball. So that plays into it.

It's also just kind of a belief, are we making individual mistakes or are we having a meltdown. And I think (loss of audio) . I didn't think he needed me to call a timeout. I thought for the most part, even though it might not have looked like it, we had the ball in the right players' hands. Spacing was an issue.

Those are the decisions we have to make as coaches. They're really hard to live with when you don't make the right one. Tonight my focus was that I needed timeouts in the last four minutes of the game because I understand what Georgia can do defensively.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

CHRIS BEARD: Thank you.

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