

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 13, 2026

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Kentucky Wildcats

Coach Mark Pope

Collin Chandler

Mouhamed Dioubate

Postgame Press Conference



played them, they weren't this good on the glass. Today they just got a lot of good tips. They won a lot of 50/50 balls.

We could have did a better job with rebounding. That's where I feel like if there had been a big difference in the game if we had rebounded more. We just got to be better.

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

Q. Do you think the way you played three games, three days, has any impact on your seeding for next week?

MARK POPE: We spend zero time on that. Things out of your control. We don't spend any time. We're just trying to get ourselves to playing the best basketball we can.

I think we gained a ton of experience in the last three days. It's important for us. I'm proud of the way our guys competed the last three days. I thought we have so much. You're just trying to steal every lesson you can. We had a lot of lessons from the last few days that we'll take with us and make a huge push in the tournament.

Q. It looked like Malachi went to the back and maybe got his leg looked at. Didn't come back in. Anything to report there?

MARK POPE: No. Just got some soreness that he'll deal with. We'll have a couple days to rehab him. He'll be in top, peak-level performance for the tournament.

Q. You always talk about learning from every game, win or loss. What do you take from today's game, from these three games against Florida this season where you didn't lead for a single second?

MARK POPE: I thought our guys, we didn't play well. We couldn't make a shot. We couldn't grab a rebound. For us, it's the way Florida, they're a good team. Give them some credit there. They challenge you in transition. They challenge you on the glass.

Florida 71, Kentucky 63

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Kentucky. We'll begin with an opening statement from Coach.

MARK POPE: All right. Frustrating night for us. I thought the guys, I thought our competitive spirit was great. We got beat up on the glass in a massive way. We were in some foul trouble, trying to manage some foul issues. We ended up being small. Even when we were big, it was hard for us on the glass. Credit Florida for that. They did a tremendous job on the glass.

We'll regroup and go home, then get ready for the NCAA tournament.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players.

Q. I know it's not the ending you wanted, but how have these three games has helped you prepare for the NCAA tournament?

COLLIN CHANDLER: A lot of opportunities to learn a lot of reps that we got this week. So we're going to take those into the next few weeks as we play in the tournament.

MOUHAMED DIOUBATE: No one is battle-tested like us. I think a lot of these games that we played this weekend will help us, is going to help us, transition to the NCAA tournament. We just going to carry on the momentum.

Q. Mo, getting beat up on the glass, was that due to Florida having too many big bodies, being tired?

MOUHAMED DIOUBATE: I think they just did a really good job on the glass tonight. Both the first two games we



Last game we handled the glass, we couldn't handle transition. This game we handled transition and we couldn't handle the glass. You have to be able to do both. You have to.

But I thought our guys, even though we didn't play well, you can sense your team as they're just grinding away and trying to find answers, if their focus is present or if they're stuck in what just happened.

I thought Otega Oweh's leadership today was on an extraordinary level. I'm telling you, I'm so proud of Otega Oweh in terms of his willingness to be present in the moment through all the frustration of the day.

It bodes well. If we can carry that with us, we have a chance. We'll play way better than this. We'll play so much better than this. I have no doubt.

If we can hang on to that ability to focus for 40 minutes on just trying to find answers, we're going to make a great run.

Q. As you look forward now to the tournament, you compare résumés of a lot of these teams, why do you think your team deserves to be on the higher end?

MARK POPE: I trust the people that are making those decisions to make those decisions.

At the end of the day, you got a bunch of teams. You got to win all your games. I'm not really concerned. We have to go play great teams. Everybody in the tournament is going to be a great team. You have to find a way to win 'em. Feels very much like the SEC. You play great teams every night. It's really not any more complicated than that.

Q. How big was it to get Kam back for these games?

MARK POPE: Yeah, I'm very, very grateful that we were able to get him into some games so he can have a little bit of feel. Now going into practice this week, it's just different when you've been in the game, then you can apply your practice to what you just experienced. I'm very grateful for that.

He was a game-time decision today. We were a little nervous. His pain went up a little bit. We limited his minutes, but he still got a touch a little bit.

Q. Looking ahead to the tournament, all the good teams you might play, how unique is Florida? Four bigs and they can move in transition.

MARK POPE: It's interesting when you look at the top, you

follow basketball, a team that is so dedicated to two-point field goal percentage, the glass. They have very much of an Arizona vibe. There's teams at the very top of the standings that are doing this a little bit different. They have tremendous size and physicality. They're actually not hungry to score from three.

They will. The first game at Florida, they hurt us in the first half making shots. They don't do that very much. They don't have to do that very much.

There are teams at the top of the standings that are built this way. There's a little bit of a unique run right now.

Q. In hindsight, do you regret using the challenge so early in the game?

MARK POPE: No. Listen, our crew that's leading that has been fantastic. I think we're probably in the 90 percentile give or take right now. It's a complicated thing because a challenge doesn't have anything to do with what your players are experiencing or the fans or anybody else. It doesn't even have anything to do with the referee. It just has to do with what they've captured on the video. That's the only thing that matters.

Every single player might be sure about something. The referees might feel like they're sure about something. If it's not caught on the video, it can't be overruled.

Our team has done a great job with these challenges. We missed tonight. You're never going to be perfect.

I would have loved to have it back because I would have loved to have challenged a bunch more calls. Although I think the referees did a tremendous job, so...

We should be safe, right?

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