

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 13, 2026

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

## Vanderbilt Commodores Coach Mark Byington

## Tyler Tanner

## Duke Miles

### Postgame Press Conference



Vanderbilt 75, Tennessee 68

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Vanderbilt. We'll take opening comments from Coach.

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, I mean, that was round three. Tennessee and Vanderbilt have had some terrific games this year.

It's two teams that are evenly matched. I just love our will to be able to pull out these last two. It's hard to beat a team in back-to-back games. Where we were...

I just thought our guys, they played super aggressive. I love it that they were just attacking the entire time. Just their mentality.

It was fun to coach 'em. Heck of a game. We're fortunate to be able to move on. We know as you keep going on, it gets tougher and tougher. We'll wake up tomorrow, there's going to be four SEC teams here. We're one of them.

We have the defending national champs. We'll prep quick.

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions for the players.

**Q. Duke, season high 30 for you tonight. What was working so well for you?**

DUKE MILES: I was just feeling the energy, honestly. I came into the game. We had a big emphasis on just rebounding, defending, bringing energy. I just tried to bring that to the game.

**Q. Tyler, what was it like having a teammate like Duke**

**go off the way he did?**

TYLER TANNER: Yeah, I've seen it a lot of times before. Nothing surprising. He was such a good leader for us tonight, even you look past the stat sheet. He brought that energy and fight that we needed to get that dub. That carried on to my teammates so we could get the win.

**Q. How important do you guys think the defense was down the stretch? There was a run, maybe three, four possessions where you got turnovers, scored off it.**

DUKE MILES: It was very important. Stops... We (indiscernible). We try to get fouls a lot. That's three starts in a row. But it was big because down the stretch, teams that come out, they get comfortable, they draw fouls, it slows the pace down.

When we get steals and we be able to run, we had to stop their run and we can go in transition and convert points.

**Q. You held Nate Ament to only one field goal made today. How important was Tyler Nickel's defense on him down the stretch?**

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, I'm glad you mentioned Tyler Nickel's name. His defense was great. He's known for other things. It's two good players from the state of Virginia. Nate is a terrific player. I thought Tyler Nickel got us going and other guys helped out.

We watched him play yesterday. He came back, wasn't rusty at all, had a terrific game. To be able to limit his scoring was huge for us. Wish we kept him off the foul line a little better, but the other parts are really good.

**Q. Coming off that double bye, a little bit of a slow start for both teams. How did you feel you were able to settle in quickly and what's the key making sure against Florida that energy is right there?**

TYLER TANNER: Yeah, we knew it was going to be a fight. We knew we were going to have to grind it out. Tennessee, a really good team. Doesn't play as fast as us.



We just wanted to stay in the game. We knew our energy to overthrow that. As we continued to play, we started scoring making plays. So down the stretch it helped out.

DUKE MILES: Just to piggyback on what Tyler said. We already know the game is going to be physical. It was going to be a low-scoring game. We just had to keep beating and fighting and grinding positions out. We knew it was going to be one possession at a time. They're a high-level team. We high level, as well. It was going to be a low-scoring game.

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

**Q. You said coming into the season a goal was to improve defensively from last year to this year. Do you feel that showed up in the second half?**

MARK BYINGTON: Well, I think the defense shows up in a lot of ways. It shows in tournament games. It shows up in road games. We finished the last three on the road. I thought we played really good defense the previous game against Tennessee.

It takes everything. We kind of anticipated not getting off to a great start. You look at the teams that had a bye, that played a team the day before, yesterday every team that had a bye was down at halftime. The only team that won was Tennessee.

We really tried to put more emphasis on our defense to hopefully kind of calm it down till our offense came around. Luckily our offense did come around.

**Q. It's usually Tyler being the one that takes over games. How good was it to see you have another player in Duke?**

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, I mean, Duke, he started looking like himself I think last week rhythm-wise and pace. The ball is in his hands was a comfort to everybody. He had a great pace to his game, making decisions. He can make passes and score. He started right away, got a layup for us right away, just the entire game, big shots, big moments.

We lean on Tyler Tanner a ton. Everybody knows that. But there's other capable guys out there, as well. So for Duke to have a big night, that's not surprising for anybody in our locker room.

**Q. Florida comes in tomorrow having won 12 games in a row. When you have a team that's on a hot streak,**

**how do you make sure mentally you're not thinking of that being daunting?**

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, I mean, they're the hottest team in the country. We don't have to beat them 12 times. We have to try to beat them once.

We had a really good game in Memorial Gymnasium this year. That could have went either way. Felt like it was a long time ago.

I think they're a different team. I think they're better than what they were when we played them at Memorial. I think we have capability to be better than we were that night.

I know they're playing for a 1 seed. I think they're deserving. They're one of the best teams in the country. We'll take a shot tomorrow and see what we got.

**Q. For most of the time since Duke has come back from injury, you had him coming off the bench. You moved him back into the starting lineup. What was the reasoning for that?**

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, might be the Ole Miss game. I'm not 100%. It's one of those things where we had the big lineup. I thought we were good in a lot of areas, rebounding and defense. You see the offensive burst that we can get with Duke. It just makes everybody better. He can find other guys.

I didn't want him to kind of lose his rotation because of an injury. He fought through an injury for much of the year. We had to get him back in rhythm, get our team in rhythm. I think we're there now.

**Q. We always hear coaches talk about how they want their team playing to their best potential in March. Safe to say you love the way your team is playing right now?**

MARK BYINGTON: I mean, we're winning a way that sometimes isn't beautiful, but as a coach it does feel beautiful. We're winning tough, grind-it-out, physical games that are hard-fought. To get a rebound in this game was difficult. It doesn't get any easier tomorrow.

I think luckily for us, with Tennessee and Florida, probably the two most physical teams in the country, and we got them on back-to-back nights. We got to recover quick.

I like our mentality now that we can win in ugly-style games, which a lot of the tournament games are like that, road games are like that. We'll need it again.

**Q. Duke is obviously going to get a lot of love after this game. You talked about Tyler. How much easier does he make your job in preparing for some of these?**

MARK BYINGTON: Tyler Tanner?

**Q. Yes.**

MARK BYINGTON: It's almost now where he has trouble surprising me. But he's just a special player. He's everything that you want, somebody to be a leader of your team, All-Conference player. He cares about our team. He cares about his teammates. He cares about winning.

I just love his fearlessness. He's getting better and better as we keep on going. He's still young. He's a special person, special player.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

MARK BYINGTON: Thank you.

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