

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 13, 2026

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

## Tennessee Volunteers Coach Rick Barnes Ja'Kobi Gillespie

### J.P. Estrella

Postgame Press Conference



Vanderbilt 75, Tennessee 68

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Tennessee. Coach Barnes, if you would give opening comments.

RICK BARNES: Congratulations to Vanderbilt on the win. From our perspective, second-half turnovers hurt us. We had a chance a couple different times to put ourselves in a position to stay in the game the way we needed to. Even when we had a lead, the second-half turnovers really came at the wrong time.

Too many fouls at the wrong time in the second half from our perspective. That would probably be the difference in the game from our perspective.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players.

**Q. Ja'Kobi, what was Vanderbilt doing in the second half that made it difficult to slow them down?**

JA'KOBI GILLESPIE: I think they were doing a lot of one-on-one, us just not guarding the ball very well. Also us bailing them out with fouls.

Yeah, I think it was a lot of foul calls, we bailing them out.

THE MODERATOR: J.P. if you would reflect on the game from your perspective.

J.P. ESTRELLA: Yeah, kind of what Ja'Kobi said, and coach, maybe some unnecessary fouls down the stretch. A lot of one-on-one breakdowns. Yeah, I feel like that's probably the biggest difference in the game.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen. You're

dismissed. We'll continue with questions for Coach Barnes.

**Q. Rick, was there any point where you thought that Nate's ankle might not be 100% during today's game? Do you feel that reflected in this game at all?**

RICK BARNES: Well, we talked about it last night. Again, we even thought about maybe not playing him at all because, again, just as a precautionary for next week.

But he said there's no way I'm not going to play.

When you don't go for 10 days, I don't care if it's ankle, knee or anything, when you play as physical of a game as we did last night, you're going to be a little sore in other areas, not just that area.

Nate tried. He did everything. Obviously we've got to make some of those shots around the rim, got to make free throws. You can just take away the turnovers in the second half, you take away those, I don't know how many they had in the first half, but in the second half I know they had six or eight. We can't defend that. Bad decisions. We made too many tough decisions. Some of them you can't do.

At this time of year, 'cause everybody can play, everybody's playing right now can play, they're going to take advantage of it. We just didn't do enough to win the game.

**Q. Is there anything that you can take away from him playing multiple games in a short period of time into next week?**

RICK BARNES: I always say sometimes there's a blessing in disguise. You always want to win, but if we'd have won today, played tomorrow and won, would we have played him tomorrow? I don't even know.

He's not 100%. We know it. But in his mind it doesn't matter, he wants to play. Maybe the loss today gives Ja'Kobi Gillespie a chance to get more rest. It will give

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Nate a chance to recover.

It would have been difficult if he didn't play at all in this tournament. To miss two and a half, three weeks in this season, it would have been hard. Even though he does everything he possibly can, there's nothing like playing, especially this time of year.

Again, we certainly want to win. If it gives him a chance to continue to get closer to 100%, which there's not many guys really at 100% this time of year. There's something going on.

Ja'Kobi has logged a lot of minutes. Maybe just a couple more days here. Certainly we want to win the SEC every chance we play, in the regular season, post-season. We all know that next week's the big one. Hopefully what we learned here the last two days, what we learned throughout the entire year...

Some of it's the same thing. Free throws today. We had a chance to build a lead in the first half. Missed free throws. Some of those around the rim we've got to make, we really do.

You look at it, we got to get a little more scoring from guys that didn't score today. More than anything, it's the turnovers. I think we only had two in the first half. Those seven were really important.

I think we had a chance twice. Fouled late in the clock. We fouled on a rebound where we didn't get turned around. Shot clock going down, got into the cylinder. Those are plays...

The guys are playing hard. We got to be smarter in those areas.

**Q. Your first matchup against Vanderbilt, in the second half you had Nate play with the four, smaller lineup. Was there any thought of trying to do that today?**

RICK BARNES: No, we thought about it. Again, he hasn't practiced. We thought about it a little bit for a second. Then we just didn't go to it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

RICK BARNES: Thank you, guys.

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