

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 13, 2026

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

**Alabama Crimson Tide**

**Coach Nate Oats**

**Aden Holloway**

**Labaron Philon Jr.**

Postgame Press Conference

Ole Miss 80, Alabama 79

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with opening comments from Coach Oats.

NATE OATS: Got to give Ole Miss a lot of credit. I mean, they're on a run. Coach Beard has coached in a national championship game before. Good coach. Know what he's doing. They had a tough regular season. He's got them playing together, playing well.

We tried to tell our guys this is a lot different team than what we saw in Oxford. They had us down in Oxford, too, then we figured some stuff, went on a run and beat them.

This team is playing harder, more connected. Looked to me like we didn't think they were that much better than the first time we played them, despite the fact they just won two games.

A little disappointed with myself just being able to convince our guys how good this team was going to be. They came out, we didn't have an edge to us. They came out ready to play. They kind of killed us on the effort stuff. In the first half, everything was real comfortable for them. We didn't play hard enough. We ended up getting out-rebounded in the game, by a large margin to start. They got going.

When you have a team that's on a run, has confidence behind them, get going, you don't play hard enough on defense, the effort stuff, you're asking for a game like where you could end up losing.

I thought we played pretty hard for the last 10 minutes. We were down 63-50 at some point there midway through the second half. We went on a big run, cut it. We kept



crawling on the lead. We gave them a lot of confidence. They held on for the win. Got to give them a bunch of credit.

Good thing for us is we played well enough at times during the year to guarantee ourself a tournament seed. But we're going to have to play significantly better. That will be one game and done in the NCAA tournament if that's the effort we're going to give in that tournament, as well.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for players.

**Q. Where do you think the disconnect was in terms of you are being prepared for this game?**

LABARON PHILON JR.: I would just say coming in on the defensive end, being able to just get those extra stops that we needed, giving up a couple rebounds that could have went our way, started our break.

We couldn't really get it going on the defensive end. Like he said, we have to be more connected on that end of the floor if we want to be able to make a run here soon.

**Q. Labaron, what was your perspective of kind of that last sequence? What did you see passing to Aden there?**

LABARON PHILON JR.: I saw him down low trying to give him an opportunity to go with the ball. I gave him the opportunity. Those guys, like Coach said, they was playing with a lot of confidence. Just, like, in that moment just trying to make the right play really. Just trying to win a game.

Those guys came up with the stop.

**Q. You seemed to have trouble finishing drives during the game. What was Ole Miss doing defensively that made it a struggle?**

ADEN HOLLOWAY: I would say they were doing a good job switching out, putting length on our guards, making it tough to make kick-out reads, make tough rim finishes. I

just give a lot of credit to them how they came out on the defensive end, especially to start the game.

**Q. As leaders for this team, what are you going to be telling your teammates to make sure you can leave this behind and hit reset?**

LABARON PHILON JR.: I would say just being able to come into a game ready, like Coach said. Put it all on the line. It's win or go home now. It's win or go home this game. We kind of let that get away.

Now, we don't get no extra chance after this win. It's really being mentally prepared, coming in with a different mindset, coming ready to play no matter who we got to play.

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

**Q. Would you have preferred Labaron try to take that shot in the last possession? Two years ago one-and-done in the SEC tournament, went to the Final Four. What do you want guys to mirror from that?**

NATE OATS: Yeah, one, I wish he would have taken it 'cause I think kind of gave it there to Aden in a tough spot. I thought he was open on a midrange. Probably should have called timeout. It's one of those we talked about. If we get a miss, we're in the flow, we think we got pretty good players that we get our spacing right, rather let them make plays before the defense gets set.

When I saw it getting a little crowded there, maybe wasn't looking good, I got the option as a coach in college basketball to call a timeout. I probably should have helped him out, called timeout. We probably should have run something a little bit better. So that's on me. You can't fault Labaron for making a pass. He's playing, having to make reads in the paint, split-second reads. He usually makes pretty good reads.

Then, you know, I don't know what our seed's going to be. Two years ago we were a 4 seed. I believe we lost in the first round of the SEC tournament that year. Now we've lost two of three. I think it was even worse than that that year down the stretch.

We've won nine of 11 and lost two of the last three. So overall, over the last month and a half, we've played pretty well. Overall, over the last three games, we haven't played very well. We have to readjust, get the right mindset, learn from this game, and then go in and get our guys playing well.

A couple of the guys have been struggling I thought were great tonight. You look at Taylor and Noah. You want to look at bright spots, those guys look great. We need play out of those two guys. Noah came in and did some things really well. Moved his feet well. Stayed in front of Ilias. Was great on defense. I'm looking at his numbers. Plus 58. It's on me. Probably should have played him more than the 13 possessions he was on defense.

When Taylor was in, we were plus 34. He was in a decent amount. He's playing better. Noah is playing better. Our front court is maybe getting some depth that we need to get. Taylor at the three, super happy for him. I love Taylor. I think his attitude has been great. He just keeps fighting, fighting. Noah came along.

Those two guys will be a big positive from this game. The rest of our guys got to do some soul searching, see how far they want to play in this NCAA tournament.

**Q. You said in your opening statement you felt a little disappointed in yourself, how you sold your team on how good Ole Miss was. Would you elaborate on that.**

NATE OATS: You go in and tell them this team has won two in a row, they're playing better. Kind of just hope that they listen to you. Maybe I needed to show them a bunch of stats, how much better they were. The team obviously struggled. Their record wasn't great. 15 seed in the SEC tournament.

You guys can look at the records, the stats, we played them once. Maybe I needed to do an analytical breakdown, show them how much better they were playing. They beat Oklahoma and Georgia who we were 0-2 against combined. I would have thought that would have been enough. Obviously it wasn't enough.

They got to understand. Who knows who we get put up against in the NCAA tournament. It could be a mid-major team that's on a run, similar to Ole Miss is on a two-game run here. They're playing better. Maybe we had been better than that team all year; they're on a recent run. Maybe it's a high major that didn't play as well, drafted a seed; now they're hungry.

Whoever we get, they're going to be fighting for their lives. Whoever wins that game plays the two days after, whoever loses it goes home. If we give the same effort we gave during the first 30 minutes, we'll be home quickly in the NCAA tournament.

**Q. Seemed like you couldn't get in a rhythm tonight. You talked about two guys that stepped up in Noah and Taylor. How do you get Trely and Amari going**

again?

NATE OATS: I mean, I personally think when you're bought into doing all the little winning stuff, you're a very talented player, the offense just flows. I think Amari started to get there in the second half. His effort was significantly better. He ends up with 11 rebounds. I don't have the halftime stats in front of me. Thought his effort, energy, toughness, impact on the game, I mean, I looked at halftime and he had a negative defensive leverage and a negative offensive leverage. Only guy on the team that did have negative on both sides in the first half.

I let him know at halftime we got to pick it up. He ended up with positive on both sides. In the second half he was significantly better. I think if he would start the game with the same mindset he had in the second half, I think he's going to be fine. Just super talented offensive player.

I think Trelly is one of those guys that had it really going. Was Player of the Week a week ago. You just got to get back to what he was doing then. With him, I think it starts the same way. How many tough blue-collar defensive plays can you make, get yourself going. He ends up with zero steals, as did most of our team. We had four guys get a steal. Taylor had two.

I think there's a lot more effort stuff that maybe he could maybe get going. He did have four rebounds.

Shoot, you just got to keep taking open shots. He's a great shooter. He's been on fire. Didn't have a great night. I don't think thinking about missing shots is going to help fix it. Let's think about the stuff you have full control over, which is your effort, particularly on the defensive end.

**Q. You were talking about when Jemison is on, he gives you a different dynamic. For you guys to make a deep run in this tournament, are you going to try to find a way to activate offensively?**

NATE OATS: I mean, we're a lot better. Again, I think similar to what I said about these other guys, I think he's a talented offensive player when he was locked into doing all the stuff he has full control over, effort on glass, effort on defense, effort crashing the offensive boards.

I'll be honest with you, a lot of our guys weren't locked into making all the effort plays, particularly on the defensive end today. I'm not singling him out. Pretty much everybody that played, with the exception of a couple guys.

Offensively we struggled a bit. We finished 50% at the rim. We didn't shoot from the free-throw line like we normally do. We didn't shoot from three like we normally do. The

only thing good is we didn't turn it over much. Our field goal percentage wasn't good.

Credit to Ole Miss, but you also have to look internally. When you're not locked into making stuff happen on the defensive end that you do have full control over your effort, I don't think you get rewarded on the offensive end.

**Q. On Wednesday when you were talking about having a six-day layoff, you mentioned there was a balance to be drawn between getting enough rest but making sure that conditioning is maintained. Do you feel like conditioning slipped at all with the layoff or not?**

NATE OATS: I don't know if conditioning slipped as much as our edge, just how sharp we were. I didn't do a good job managing that six days, I don't think. We should have gone harder.

I really swung the pendulum really far making sure that we were fresh, injury-free. Didn't do much in practice. It was kind of the vibe I got from the team. Obviously it wasn't the right thing to do.

I did look at our practice the last time we won this thing. We got after it pretty hard on Monday. We didn't do that this year just 'cause we've had so many injuries. I didn't want to risk getting an injury. Obviously I made the wrong decision.

So it's pretty easy to second-guess yourself afterwards. Yeah, I didn't do that one right this week.

**Q. You talked after Georgia about maybe some of the young guys didn't understand what it's going to take to win in March. Is it frustrating it feels like they had to relearn that lesson?**

NATE OATS: Yeah, it wasn't just the young guys. Some of our older guys didn't give us the effort we needed in the first half either.

The whole team needs to understand this stuff is not easy in March. Everybody is playing for their lives. Ole Miss, as soon as Ole Miss loses, their season's over. So they're trying to win the whole thing, which we try to tell the guys. With the way they're playing, they're giving themselves a chance. Being a 15 seed is going to make it tough, because they're going to have to go five days in a row. Charlie Henry went five days in a row and won all five, missed on the sixth in the championship. It's been done.

Guys were thinking because we were able to rest for six days, we were going to be able to run these guys out of the

gym. It didn't happen. You run people out of the gym when you get stops on the defensive end. When you're not playing hard enough to get stops on the defensive end, it doesn't matter if they're playing their third game in a row and you're fresh, you end up with a loss, which is what we ended up with tonight.

It's not just the freshmen that need to learn how to win in March. It's everybody. We got to get back to playing hard, fully locked into the stuff we have full control over, and making effort plays on both ends of the floor, defensive effort plays, offensive rebounding effort plays. We didn't do a good job of that. Ole Miss did a much better job of that than we did today.

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