

Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 14, 2026

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

Vanderbilt Commodores Coach Mark Byington

Tyler Tanner

Jalen Washington

Postgame Press Conference



Vanderbilt 91, Florida 74

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

MARK BYINGTON: You could tell how much we wanted the game and how focused we were. From start to finish, we came out with just an incredible intensity. We knew we had to play well. Right now I think Florida was the hottest team in the country. Probably deserving of a 1 seed, defending national championship, the list of accolades that they deserve.

We knew (indiscernible) beat them. They weren't going to give us anything. I thought our guys did that. They went out from start to finish, played physical, fearless, played the right way, played team basketball. So many guys stepped up. That's what you need to be able to beat a good team.

Proud of the guys. Not really much celebrating. It's on the Sunday, and that's what we started this tournament for, is to play for a trophy on Sunday, and that's what we have a chance to do tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players.

Q. Tyler, you had a hot game. Going into these pretty intense matchups, how did you prepare for this?

TYLER TANNER: Yeah, as a team, it was a game we needed. We were all levelheaded going into it. Beating Tennessee was good yesterday. Got over that pretty quick. Got focused on this next game.

We went in with confidence. We wanted to win the fight from the jump. That's what we did.

Q. Jalen, a lot of people in the country believe Florida has the best front court in the country. What did this team show you were capable of?

JALEN WASHINGTON: I mean, we took it personal. We played them before at home a couple months ago and lost. Came up short.

We knew how physical and how intense the game was going to be. We already had in our minds that we just had to go out there and be war ready.

I feel like we showed up today. We competed at the highest level today.

Q. Tyler, you guys have obviously a momentum. You just beat what could be a 1 seed in the tournament. Regardless of what happens tomorrow, the last 48 hours, is that going to give you confidence going into the big one?

TYLER TANNER: Yeah, a lot of confidence. Two very, very good teams. We're going to play a good team tomorrow whether it's Arkansas or Ole Miss. We want to build this momentum now. We think this is the best team to be at our best, in March. So we're going to carry this momentum over from today to tomorrow. Hopefully from tomorrow into NCAA tournament.

Q. Jalen, seemed in moments in the second half that you controlled the momentum. What did you talk about pregame about how you were going to control and run the show?

JALEN WASHINGTON: We knew it was going to be a battle down there. They got some really strong, active bigs. We had to compete, hit first. We had to really pursue the ball.

Q. You hit a lot of midrange shots, three-pointers. Was that in the plan going into the day or how the game unfolded?

JALEN WASHINGTON: I think it's kind of how the game unfolded, taking what the defense gave me. Always staying ready and prepared for whatever might come.

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

Q. A lot of people have questioned the size of the roster composition. Two days in a row you've been heavily out-rebounded but still been able to come away with a win. What does it say about the team's ability to compete against bigger teams?

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, I'm glad I don't listen to a lot of people or even know that myself.

These guys are tough. We have versatility. We can go to bigger lineup, AK Okereke at the small forward and play two bigs together. The two teams we just played, there might be more, but I doubt there's any more physical, size on the inside than these two teams.

We stood our ground. I think there was some room for improvement there. But the fight was there. All those guys really fought for rebounds, fought for possessions. They competed. So even if we came up short a little bit, sometimes the second effort made up for it.

Q. Your team won by 17 points. What does that say about your team's efficiency?

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, I mean, they got a lot of misses back. I think it was one possession they got it back. What we wanted to do, if a guy rebound back, let's not give in on that.

We wanted to play until the possession was over. I thought we got a little careless there about three and a half minutes to go. I think we were able to settle back in. I got experienced guards. When I got two guards, one has eight assists, one has seven assists, the ball is going the right places. You're going to see other guys be successful. I thought the guards did a great job controlling the game.

Q. You praised your team yesterday for the way they attacked the game. How about the first half today?

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, that was huge. Getting us going, momentum, kind of breaking down their defense with our defense. In the halfcourt, I mean, they are tough. The size and everything else, the physicality.

Tyler Tanner and Duke Miles, some of the guys being aggressive with their hands, turning offense.

You need something like that in this game. I know our assistants have been talking about it to our players, and we've been echoing it. You are going to have to make some defensive plays, some plays that might not be scripted. Use your instincts, and those guys did.

Q. There is a big timeout in the 14 minutes in the second half. What do you tell your team in those moments to keep their heads cool?

MARK BYINGTON: After the goal got broken or after the technical?

Q. (No microphone.)

MARK BYINGTON: It felt like the first eight minutes of the second half took forever. I wanted to get Tyler Tanner out, but there were so many stoppages. We go long timeouts now in the SEC tournament. We didn't need any more. We had great momentum, but we had to regather it.

The game probably took a long time. I felt like the eight minutes were forever. We never really lost focus, never lost our intensity, no matter what it was.

Q. You won 20 games last year. I think today was the 26th of this season. Might be a 3 seed in the tournament. How have you been able to put together rosters that can compete at the highest levels in the SEC?

MARK BYINGTON: We're looking for certain types of guys. First and foremost, care about winning. That's not a given with all these athletes these days. Sometimes people are motivated by other things. When they care about winning, they care about each other, you have a team that competes like this, shares the ball.

We try to find guys like that. I have a locker room full of them.

Q. Five players scoring in double figures in this game. How do you manage to be able to find that much offensive versatility?

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, I mean, we had confidence in our offense coming into the game. We scored 94 points against them the first time we played them. That might have been the most of any SEC team.

We really put our focus on defense. The offense is going to take care of itself as long as we rebound, play defense. But the sharing of the ball and making good decisions. With Duke Miles and Tyler Tanner being able to find guys, making them be successful, I thought that was the biggest

part of our offense.

Q. I was wondering what it meant for you, for the team, for the organization, to be on the doorsteps of winning your first SEC trophy since 2012?

MARK BYINGTON: Yeah, I mean, you could sit there and be cliché, say it's another game. That would not be accurate. This is what we want. We want to be playing on Sunday. We want to be playing a championship game.

It was one step at a time. We passed the first two. Tomorrow we'll have to be the same way. We'll compete. We're going to play a team that's on a winning streak, a team that earned their right to get there, just like we did. We want to play at a high level tomorrow. When a trophy is on the line, you're going to see guys flying everywhere.

I hope there is a lot of black and gold in Bridgestone tomorrow. Buy out the tickets, get in there. Buy 'em now before they figure out the result of this next game. If you can get the message out there, Vandy fans, let's pack it up.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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