

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 14, 2026

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

**Ole Miss Rebels**

**Coach Chris Beard**

**Malik Dia**

**AJ Storr**

Postgame Press Conference

Arkansas 93, Ole Miss 90, OT

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Ole Miss. Coach, if you would give us an opening statement.

CHRIS BEARD: Does everybody need to stand up and stretch a little bit, do a couple jumping jacks? When we meet with our team, it's eight to ten minutes. The attention span goes away. We were back there waiting a long time.

Normally, in all my years in college basketball, the SID requests the players that come up here. I wanted to be joined by these two guys tonight.

I want to be very clear in what I have to say. I appreciate AJ Storr choosing to come play for us at Ole Miss. It wasn't the overall season either one of us envisioned.

AJ is one of the most misunderstood stories in all of college basketball. I've never coached a more loyal, poised, even-headed guy. I feel like I know AJ as well as I can possibly know him in a one-year setting because we went through everything together.

We had a few highs. This weekend was a good run. We've obviously had some lows. I have a lot of respect for AJ. AJ is going to play basketball till he chooses not to play anymore or his body gives out. I really appreciate AJ. I'll have his back forever, period.

Malik Dia, same thing. I appreciate Malik Dia, two years ago choosing to come play in our program when he had other options. At the time that Malik Dia made the decision to come play for us, we weren't coming off an NCAA tournament, nothing like that. Malik believed in the vision. Malik was a huge part of our Sweet 16 last year, arguably



the best team in Ole Miss history, tied with another Sweet 16 team.

I got a lot of respect for Malik. I coach Malik really hard. The outside world kind of saw that. Don't get it twisted. I always had his back; he always had my back. From our first conversation at a coffeehouse here in Nashville, Malik told me what he wanted out of basketball and in life. I still remain as confident as ever today that Malik will achieve any goal he wants in basketball.

Obviously I saw a lot about these guys' character this year through the ups and downs of the season. But I love Malik. I'll never forget him choosing our program in the first place.

These two guys to my right, there's nothing more I can say about these guys. I respect them.

This season was a journey, ups and downs. Your true character comes out during adversity. We had our share of adversity. But to finish the way we finished the season year I think speaks highly of everybody in our locker room, including these two seniors to my right. I have a lot of respect for these guys.

The basketball game briefly. We made more shots than the opponent. We made more threes than the opponent. Turnovers were around even. The glaring difference in the game was the free-throw differential. 22 fouls to 10. We fouled twice at the end of the game on purpose. Really foul count was 10 to 20. That's frustrating because it gives us a great opportunity to learn this off-season, study this team, how we can help our guys get to the free-throw line more and how we can keep the opponent off the free-throw line.

But I thought our guys played with a lot of courage today. We played the game to win. We did not lose this game today. We simply ran out of time. AJ had two game winners today. He made one. One of 'em rimmed out on us. We needed one more minute to play. We just kind of ran out of time today.

Any questions for these two guys, AJ or Malik.

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**Q. AJ, Coach Cal said he wished that he had called a timeout. Can you take us through your mindset there as you're driving and scoring that basket.**

AJ STORR: I just seen him. He pressed up on me, so I just went around him and laid it up.

**Q. Obviously very high praise from Coach Beard. Can you talk about what he means to you and what the biggest lesson you'll take into the next chapter of your life is.**

AJ STORR: I appreciate Coach Beard. He really works really hard. He deserves to win. I'm just thankful for him for recruiting me to go here.

A lot of ups and downs throughout this season, but he never quit on us. He kept coaching us hard. Kept holding us accountable. Wish we could keep playing, but we just lost, so...

MALIK DIA: Yeah, Coach Beard got the best out of me every single day. Practices were intense. Games were intense. All he cares about is winning. Winning is the biggest thing when he comes to a team sport. That's one of the biggest things I can ever learn from him, is just the winning aspect of the game. Also in life when you want something, you kind of got to go get it. He kind of instilled that in me of you have to do what it takes to win. Everybody talks about the process, the work. It's real. It's real here at Ole Miss.

I super appreciate Coach for allowing me to come here and play in the SEC and play for him.

**Q. AJ, what did you learn from your one season here? Did this run in the tournament change what you learned from this season?**

AJ STORR: Just to keep fighting through everything you go through in life. Everything won't be perfect all the time. All that matters is how you respond, how you wake up the next day, how you approach the next day. Just having a balanced mindset, just take on whatever is next.

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

**Q. When you look back at this season and the struggles you endured, the run you made here, what are you going to remember about this team?**

CHRIS BEARD: They just didn't quit. You wake up, it's your eight-year-old daughter's birthday party and you wake

up and you're sick. Most people can't get out of bed, but you got to get out of bed.

On the way to work, you get a speeding ticket. Later that day, the clown that you hired for your daughter's birthday, he cancels on you. The boss wants to talk to you about a review. You go out to the parking lot, your car tire is slashed, but somehow, somehow you can't quit. You got to get to your daughter's birthday party.

When you get there, you can't act like you had a bad day. Stone face, if you have to. Our guys didn't quit. Our home fans know that. The national media just sees the score, the win/loss record.

But this team competed all the way to the end. The speech that I just gave them in the locker room after the game is one of the hardest things you have to do each season. Everybody has to do it except for one team.

Even on that last night, I've been in that last game before, the Monday night game, you have to give that speech unless the confetti is coming down on you.

Today was a different speech I envisioned giving this team because of the way we made a run here in Nashville. Just so happy and proud of the players. I know there's a lot of lessons this year that they did tap back into, not only in their basketball careers but in their lives, being husbands, fathers.

The guys didn't quit. That's not coaching speak. It's just true. You saw how we played. We didn't lose the game today. We ran out of time. Big difference. We're one inch away from being in here preparing for the championship game tomorrow.

**Q. What is the interest level in NIT or any other tournament like that?**

CHRIS BEARD: I haven't even thought about that. First time it's even been mentioned to me.

**Q. Adversity can break or bring a team together. We saw how this season played out. Talk about how you saw the players grow as individuals in this tournament.**

CHRIS BEARD: We just kept fighting. I wish I had some kind of other way to say it with words. Heartbreaking loss. Next day, 10 a.m., film session. You walk in the gym, guys are working on their game, shooting free throws, watching clips. I walk in that film room, 15 players looking at you, let's go back to work. Let's try to win the next one.

Two things in our program: mental toughness, the mental is to the physical as four is to one. These guys are mentally tough. You saw how we played down the stretch here. Tough times pass, tough people last. I don't know if I've ever had a team exemplify that more than these guys. We had a lot of tough times, but we kept fighting.

No other way to say it other than these guys didn't quit on themselves, on the team, the coaching staff. They allowed us to coach 'em hard every day all the way down to the last possession.

**Q. You said earlier this week you didn't have the regular season that anyone wanted to have. How can you take the momentum from the last few days and build that into the off-season and next basketball season?**

CHRIS BEARD: That's a good question. Probably not in the mental space to answer that fully now.

I know this: we're going to support our players 100% of the time. Obviously in college basketball, guys choose to go elsewhere, they choose to come back. Each player on our team will have that decision. It will be their decision. It will be a conversation to make sure that both sides align.

Our seniors, including AJ and Malik that were up here, we'll support them in their pro paths, their careers.

Our relationship with these players is just getting started whether we coach them next year or not. That's one thing you can get in our program, we're going to have your back for the rest of our lives. These guys, hopefully every single one of them will outlive me by a million years. Till the day I'm not here anymore, we'll have their backs (tearing up).

**Q. Is there anything you want to say to Ole Miss Nation supporting you all through that run you had?**

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, first thing is thank you. Attendance this year, season ticketholders, students. We had a lot of people travel here in Nashville. A lot of students travel here to Nashville. So just thank you.

Thank you everybody in the community. Thank you to my administration, Chancellor Boyce and Keith. The first thing, just a strong thank you. No other way to put it.

You really learn about a relationship when you go through tough times. But our fan base was nothing short of just supportive this year.

Obviously we're going to keep building this program. We're just getting started. We're looking forward to putting a

better product on the court next year. We're going to do everything in our power in the next two months to put that roster together, in the next 11 months to put ourselves in a position where next year, no matter what happens here in Nashville, it won't be our last tournament of the season.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

CHRIS BEARD: Thank you.

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