

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 15, 2026

Nashville, Tennessee, USA

Bridgestone Arena

## Vanderbilt Commodores Coach Mark Byington Tyler Nickel Duke Miles

Postgame Press Conference

Arkansas 86, Vanderbilt 75

THE MODERATOR: We are ready to begin. We'll take opening comments from Coach and questions for our players.

MARK BYINGTON: First thing is congratulations to Arkansas. They made the plays they had to make to be able to win the game. And I thought we played really well. A lot of things did not go our way. I mean, the breaks of this game, where on a normal night, we feel like we're going to be on the right side of the scoreboard.

They had guys who were, all season long, (indiscernible) 3-point shooters. They made shots tonight. Give them credit. Brazile, Richmond, and Wagner, they were 9 for 12 in 3-point line, and every one of them is below a 30 percent guy, and I think Richmond is 14 percent. Sometimes it doesn't go your way. Acuff was terrific. Our guys competed. They played hard. We played the right way. It was a great tournament run.

We do a great job at this. Our program is about we get knocked down, we get back up. We're dejected. We wanted this. We put everything into it. We'll get back up and we're excited about the NCAA tournament coming up next week.

**Q. Tyler, is this just as simple as you tip your cap to a team that was hot today and maybe played a little bit better than you in this game?**

TYLER NICKEL: Like Coach said, they made the plays they needed to win, especially down the stretch. We were sticking to our game plan and guys just made big plays.



At the end of the day, you do kind of tip your cap. We didn't play perfect, by any means. No one ever plays perfect. There's things we could have cleaned up. But they made the plays they needed to.

**Q. Tyler, just what kind of confidence do you think you'll take from this tournament, knocking down five 3s today. Same question, Duke, with the performance you had. What do you think this will do for you guys going forward?**

DUKE MILES: Overall, it will be better for the whole team. Obviously, we lost today, but we won the last four out of five games we played last. We had a good rhythm. We're trying to carry it over to March Madness. Tyler had been in a slump. Knocking down shots today, I saw the rim getting bigger for him. That helps our team to space out the floor. I see him get going. I try to get him and my teammates going.

TYLER NICKEL: I think we're going to bring a lot of confidence into the tournament. For me personally, like Duke said, I was in a slump, out-of-character performances.

Seeing the ball go through the net always makes you feel a little more comfortable. At the end of the day, we can try and bring as much confidence into it. Right now, obviously, it stings. We wanted that chip, but we know there's a lot more for us in the future. Our biggest games are in front of us.

**Q. Duke, what makes Darius Acuff so difficult to handle defensively?**

DUKE MILES: His speed and his physicality. He gets into your body and you can't body up and ride him. When he gets that inch of space, you can't ride him down. That makes him very tough. And his elusiveness. Being an 18-year-old, an athlete like that, he's a very tough player.

**Q. Duke, I know the game didn't obviously turn out the way you guys wanted it. Can you appreciate what a high-level basketball game that was from both sides**



## for a championship game?

DUKE MILES: Of course. Everybody wants to see a chippy game or a tight game. I feel like both teams competed on a very high level. We tip our hats to Arkansas. They deserve it. The guys made the shots and the coaches made the adjustments they needed to make. At the end of the day, we fight hard. Like Tyler and Coach said, our best basketball is yet to come. Every time we get knocked down, we'll get back up.

## Q. You played the three teams in the tournament probably the toughest match-ups for you. How much does that help you going into the NCAA tournament?

TYLER NICKEL: I think that was the biggest thing for us. The SEC is so talented from top to bottom. The teams we had to face are perfect to get us ready for the postseason. Physical, hard playing, strong front courts. We had to be super tough and aggressive. Their intensity and the way we needed to play to win and compete in those games is what we'll need going forward.

DUKE MILES: He's on. I got nothing.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, you're dismissed.

TYLER NICKEL: Thank you.

DUKE MILES: Thank you.

## Q. Mark, you've got Tyler, Duke. You've got some great guards. What is Darius Acuff doing right now?

MARK BYINGTON: His shiftiness and the speed's elite. His speed and the way he moves is going to be good for the NBA too. It's not just college. With him needing more than one guy that can guard him, team defense, we were compromised today because we wanted multiple bodies at him to try to help out. He's a willing passer. He can make the right play. We try to make other guys make plays, and they did.

So it was just one of those things where he's so talented, he didn't fight the game. He stayed aggressive. But he made plays for his teammates and himself. He's tough to guard. There's not a lot of great game plans, obviously, this year that people have been able to stop him.

## Q. Coach, when you look at the rebounding balance today, one of the biggest narratives about your team this season is they're undersized. But the rebounding battle against Arkansas was fairly even today. Looking at it, how does that make you more confident going forward that one of the things that has been one

## of your perceived shortcomings for the team kept you in the battle today?

MARK BYINGTON: I think all tournament long, we went against the toughest rebounding teams and held our own. The rebounding really in all of these games weren't a factor to cost us the game. We'd like it to be a positive. Maybe we're not quite built that way.

At the same time, our guys, I love the way they fight. I love the way they compete. Sometimes, there's undersized guys, but at the same time our toughness can come through. It did today too. We just didn't quite have enough.

## Q. Mark, you mentioned early in the season you wanted to get more fans to Memorial. You said yesterday, let's get Vandy fans in Bridgestone. Today did you look at the atmosphere and see the support and feel like they listened to you?

MARK BYINGTON: I can tell you this. I was hearing the chants of hearing VU and echoing out through Bridgestone. It felt good. It felt like they loved this team and they loved the work we put in.

We wanted this game not just for ourselves, not just for Vanderbilt as a whole but for the fan base. We do feel -- we're hurt right now. We wanted it for a lot of people and put a lot into this. The crowd that came out was tremendous. We love and appreciate that and, hopefully, they travel with us to wherever we're going in the NCAA Tournament. We don't like to let people down when they give to us like that. It was a great crowd.

## Q. Coach, this is John Calipari's 16th conference championship. How hard is it to coach against somebody with that much experience? What can you learn from it on the sidelines?

MARK BYINGTON: It wasn't myself against Calipari. He's won 900 games. I sent him a text message a couple weeks ago when he got it. A tremendous coach.

It wasn't myself against him. If he was coaching the 3-point shooting with those guys, then yeah, he did an unbelievable job. He's Hall-of-Famer, great coach. I'll learn from everything.

This type of situation, you got to dare to be great. You've got to dare to put yourself in these moments. Hopefully, this moment comes again for myself and whatever Vanderbilt team we have next.

## Q. Mark, the second half when Brazile and Arkansas



**start the firing off 3s faster than the first half, you called a couple time-outs during several points. Did you try to adjust or tell your team in that back stretch when it came to that perimeter defense?**

MARK BYINGTON: It was a lot of stay the course. If you get spread on Acuff, he's going to the rim. We just didn't have -- nobody has somebody to keep him in front. So that's a challenge right there.

I'm going to relive this probably for the rest of my life. You're thinking it's four minutes to go, it's a one-possession game. And Brazile makes a 3. And then Tyler Tanner, who was unbelievable, misses a lay-up. AK Okereke misses a wide-open 3. Jalen Washington misses at the rim. The things went against us. We're fighting for a rebound, the ball gets tipped in. Acuff throws up a 3 one time as a prayer and it goes in.

That's a lot to overcome. We couldn't overcome it, and it was their day. We did everything we could to try to make it ours and try to turn it around. Those things are hard to overcome.

We almost did. That was the thing. We almost overcame all of that.

**Q. Mark, a lot of coaches here, we've talked seeding and we deserve to be this or that. What do you expect here in a couple of hours? What are you wanting to see? What do you think you'll see?**

MARK BYINGTON: Normally, I'm into it. I know this because it's a fact somebody told me. We've got ten Quad 1 wins. It's sixth most in the country. Y'all can fact check that. I hope I'm not wrong. This league, the way we're playing right now, we should be a high seed.

Regardless, we're not going to bicker. We're not going to complain. As soon as they announce where we're going, we're almost erasing the numbers. We're happy to be there. We'll compete. But this team has had a really good year. So they earned something high, but that's out of our control right now. We had our lost chance here a couple minutes ago.

I do hope the brackets weren't set a couple days ago and they were watching us all the way through here because we could have got this game. We got the last two. We're playing good basketball.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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