

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Ole Miss vs Iowa State

Sunday, March 23, 2025

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

Fiserv Forum

Ole Miss Rebels

Coach Chris Beard

Davon Barnes

Matthew Murrell

Media Conference

Ole Miss 91, Iowa State 78

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Ole Miss Head Coach Chris Beard and student-athletes Davon Barnes and Matthew Murrell.

CHRIS BEARD: Just congratulations to Iowa State on a really good season. Obviously both teams were a little bit outmanned. We're missing Mikeal Brown, and they're missing one of their best players.

Really happy for everybody in our program, organization to get to this stage here, year two. It's all about the players. Matt and Brake and Ju coming back, all the guys like Barnes to my right. They trusted us with a vision.

It hasn't been done recently, but telling these guys what we thought we could do at Ole Miss, they trusted us enough to come. Excited about the players. All my thoughts are on those guys.

We came here to win a four-team tournament. So two down. It takes six to win the whole thing. Told the guys to enjoy this for half a day and we will get back to work tomorrow. We're excited about our next opportunity in the Sweet 16.

The basketball game, it was important to us to take care of the ball. Iowa State is one of the best in the country on forcing turnovers, 16, 17 a game on average. Our thing is to try to take care of the ball. It was a scary start for us. We had three turnovers in the first four minutes, but then to play the rest of the game with only five turnovers, that was the game, from our perspective.



Proud of everybody in our organization, and looking forward to competing next weekend.

Q. Chris the other day talked about the poise y'all had to withstand the North Carolina second half run. And acknowledging the slow start, what is the poise of this team to have handled these moments at this time of the year?

MATTHEW MURRELL: I think we can credit it to the veteran leadership. We have a lot of veteran guys, a lot of seniors, a lot of guys who played a lot of college basketball.

And we emphasized winning time, the last few minutes of the game, taking care of the ball, execute, whatever the coach is calling, trying to get the best shot we can.

So I credit Coach for challenging us in practice to win in those moments and us going out there and executing it.

Q. For both of you, Chris referred to the first few minutes as scary. After that, you guys dominated the game. What do you attribute that to?

DAVON BARNES: I think it's just, you know, us settling into the game. Iowa State just wanted to turn us over. But we came out sluggish, and once we settled in, we played our game, played our tempo, executed our offense and executed on defense, and then we had our foot on the gas from there.

MATTHEW MURRELL: Just like he was saying, the big thing was we had too many turnovers the first few minutes. Our goal is to always have eight or less turnovers, and Iowa State is the team that forces 16, 17 turnovers a game.

So I feel like once we started taking care of the ball more, we was able to settle in and play.

Q. Matt, you've been banged up this year. How meaningful was it for you to keep extending your season with this group of guys?

MATTHEW MURRELL: It means everything. Being hurt, and being able to go out there and still battle, affect



winning with this team at a high level, it means everything. I praise God for allowing me to be able to continue to play without further damaging myself.

DAVON BARNES: He's a dog.

Q. SEC has now broken a record for most teams in the Sweet 16 with seven. Both teams out of this pod have advanced. What do you think about that? How has this league prepared you to make a run in the tournament?

DAVON BARNES: All year long everybody was talking about how dominant SEC was in the nonconference, and going into conference play, it was still dominant. Every game every night was a tough game. It doesn't surprise me at all that going into March Madness we have so many teams in the Sweet 16 because every team in that league was so good, and the results show.

MATTHEW MURRELL: It's a dogfight every night, day in, day out. It's two games a week. So in the tournament you have one-day prep, sometimes you have most of the week, depending on when you are playing.

Just the quick turnarounds, being able to do that in the SEC play, it allows us to be able to do it here in the tournament.

Q. Matthew, what gave you confidence going into the season that y'all could do what you've been able to do? This hasn't been done a whole lot at Ole Miss.

MATTHEW MURRELL: Looking at the guy right there. Every day he instills confidence in us. We all trust the work we put in, the process, day in, day out, the consistency of it, never taking each day for granted, trying to maximize our 24 hours. Every day we're just working, and we let the work show.

Q. This veteran group coming together, throughout the course of the last couple seasons, what stands out to both of you about that?

DAVON BARNES: I think it's everybody just buying in, coming in with all these transfers to Ole Miss, a lot of guys from different areas, different colleges, different teams. And once you get it all together, how we all bought into our roles and the game plan, what Coach had for us. And ultimately the results show, once everybody buys in, that we can win.

MATTHEW MURRELL: Buying in was definitely a big thing. In this world of transfers now, people transfer for certain reasons, but I feel like everybody that came to this

program, we came to this program with one meaning, that's to win. Most of the guys haven't been to the tournament to be able to make a run in the tournament, so it is special for all of us.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you to our student-athletes. Questions for Coach.

Q. I was wondering if you might elaborate about, when you were talking about earlier, the first few minutes being scary. After that you guys played some of your best basketball this season. What led to the switch?

CHRIS BEARD: Yeah, we just kind of had a disappointing start because we spent a day and a half talking about some offensive spacing and objectives, and we just kind of did quite the opposite, early.

But give the guys credit, we got a poised group. They allow me to be me, especially JuJu, he always calms me down. I thought we did a great job of executing the game plan for 35 of the 40 minutes, and the big part of the game plan was trying to take care of the basketball.

Q. Chris, you have coached in the Big 12. Having this outcome and the advancement to the next weekend, what does that mean as an SEC coach?

CHRIS BEARD: It's really not about me. It's just about these players. I mean, we got guys that have played four and five years of college basketball and given everything they could have possibly given and just haven't played in the NCAA Tournament yet.

And we felt that pressure. We were kind of a, you know, win-or-bust team. We set the objective really high. We want to go in the tournament, we want to have a good seed. We want to be one of those teams that has a chance to win the tournament.

And Ole Miss winning the tournament, probable? No. Possible? Absolutely.

Right now with our team, we're watching the Coach Valvano special. And we're done yet. Players are like, When are we going to finish? I'm like, We're going to finish on Sunday night right before the Monday game.

So it's not arrogance, it's absolute belief. If I didn't believe this team was capable of continuing to win games in this tournament, then I shouldn't be the coach at Ole Miss.

But this is all about the players. These guys have bought in, they've been an unselfish group since the first day of summer. And to see their hard work pay off is really

rewarding.

Q. You said these guys let you be you. Has this team adopted your personality, become more like maybe the way you are?

CHRIS BEARD: I think, above all, I'm very competitive. And I think, above all, I don't try to think of words. I don't really care about people's feelings that I have a relationship with.

So with the players, kind of a direct teaching. So, yeah, these players have allowed me to do that, just like as a coaching staff we have tried to reach the guys in the best way we can reach them. Some of these guys need that. They need the hard, direct message. Some of these guys need poise and confidence in moments.

But I would say it's an accurate statement. These guys have allowed our coaching staff to coach them, and I think they have allowed each guy in our program to be the best version of themselves as individuals as well.

Q. Even from November, you have coached Dia really hard from what I've seen. With how he played tonight, has that paid off?

CHRIS BEARD: I thought Dia played well tonight. Just a handful of possessions that if he flips those, he plays elite. I give him a grade of great, not good. He came to play, did a lot of good things. But there is such a high ceiling to his game.

And our Ole Miss team right now, continuing to play in this tournament we need Dia's A+ game. He is a talented player. We have a relationship. I appreciate him letting me coach him in the best way I know how. Proud of him. He's put a lot of work into this. And to see the work pay off now in his third year of college basketball, I'm really happy for Dia.

Q. I'm just wondering, Sean Pedulla, what has his stager, confidence, experience, what has his addition meant to this program?

CHRIS BEARD: A key to the game tonight was we get five guys in double-figure scoring. We take care of the basketball, and we were committed to the defensive end for most of the game.

You mentioned Sean Pedulla. We have several players on our team that are fearless guys. They all have the courage to take that shot, make that play on defense.

One of our challenges this year has been, when this

journey started, making sure that each individual player could be the best version of themselves, but also let's work this as a too many.

So we spent time this summer watching the USA Basketball documentary trying to demonstrate how their team was a bunch of talented guys that came together with one purpose. Our team is a bunch of talented guys that come together with one purpose. Certainly not saying that we are USA Basketball talented, but there are a lot of parallels.

I think that's one of the stories of our team, is all these guys, they check their egos at the door when they arrived at Oxford, and they're playing for each other.

Q. Coach, Dia told me that you sold winning more than anyone else who recruited him in the portal, and that was how every conversation was, Final Four, national championship. And to go back in the locker room after selling that and to say that the vision you shared was correct, how does that make you feel?

CHRIS BEARD: Makes me feel great because those are the stories that will come later in life when we're having a reunion, hanging out, seeing each other as life goes on. We will remember the bold statements that were made by players and coaches, and to see some of those things come to reality is cool, but I didn't shed my words with this team. The very first meeting we had we were talking about winning at the highest level.

Not trying to make the tournament but being one of those teams that has a pathway to a tournament. My thing about winning is if there is a scoreboard -- what is it? If there is a scoreboard on, you gotta try to win. Everything we do is competitive, and that's one thing I try to get across, especially -- portal recruiting is like speed dating. You got five minutes on the first phone call, ten minutes on the first Zoom, 30 minutes in the first meeting. And you try and make an impression on that player. So we talk a lot about come to Ole Miss and help us win.

We define winning. Winning off the court, winning in the classroom, and certainly winning in the NCAA Tournament. It's rewarding to see some of the things we talked about come to reality.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. Congratulations.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

