

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Kentucky vs Tennessee

Friday, March 28, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Lucas Oil Stadium

**Kentucky Wildcats**

**Mark Pope**

**Lamont Butler**

**Andrew Carr**

**Koby Brea**

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Tennessee 78, Kentucky 65

THE MODERATOR: Coach, we'll ask for you to make an opening statement.

MARK POPE: It's hard to talk about basketball right now. Congratulations to Tennessee. They played really hard and really well. I have a ton of respect for Coach Barnes. Mostly, we're just sad that this is over.

THE MODERATOR: Please raise your hand, and we'll get you a microphone.

**Q. I wanted to ask, for all three of you, with Coach being by your side right now, what can you say about him in his first season, making it all the way to the Sweet 16. I mean him as a coach and you as a team.**

LAMONT BUTLER: I would say it's incredible, man. We came in, nobody not knowing each other, really no coaching staff, and we built something that was really great, really inspiring for other people. To even play at Kentucky is a dream come true for myself and a lot of guys up here. We're grateful for him to bring us here and to bring us something that we may not have experienced before this year and really, just really grateful, honestly.

KOBY BREA: Yeah, I think the University of Kentucky is in great hands. Just to see what he's done this year, his first year. And not only that, but he's a life-changer to just our group. I feel like he's helped us so much off the court and



on the court, and it's going to be really special to see what he continues to do for this team and for this university.

ANDREW CARR: Yeah, I agree with what those guys said. A lot of us, even just one year ago, never thought we would be at Kentucky. For Coach Pope to believe in everybody who is on the team, believe in myself is really special for all of us and super proud of the team and everybody this system. We were able to make history at the mecca of college basketball.

So for us to be able to come in here in Coach Pope's first year and be able to do that has been nothing short of amazing, and I'm super excited to see for the next 10, 15 years what kind of dominant run Coach Pope can start.

**Q. For all three players, you all talked in the beginning you didn't think you would wear a UK jersey. What's the journey been like now that it's over, and what's it going to be like to take that jersey off for the last time?**

ANDREW CARR: Yeah, certainly very difficult. Don't want to untie my shoes. Don't want to take off this jersey. Definitely shout out BBN and all the fans. It's like nowhere I have ever experienced, and really have just had the most fun playing basketball this season, and I really appreciate them and caring about us more than just basketball players. You're welcomed into the Kentucky family, and it's a family for a reason. It's an amazing experience that hurts right now, but as we continue to get older, to look back and be more and more proud as time goes on.

KOBY BREA: Yeah, I don't know who is in charge of the jerseys and all that, but they're going to go through some trouble to get mine. (Laughter) It's still surreal every time I walk in the locker room, and I'm able to put this jersey on. Just from everything I have dealt with, everything I have been through, where I come from, just to put it on, it's super special and just to have my brothers, we were all strangers when we first got here, and we didn't have a lot of time really to bond and get to know each other and make this possible what we just did. We're all a big family now and BBN has been amazing. They made this dream a reality for real for me. Ever since I stepped onto campus, they have greeted me with open arms and been amazing to me and my family. It's been everything I have wanted and more.

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LAMONT BUTLER: Yeah, this is a special place with special people around. The whole program. The fans, they're out there every day. Even when I got here, greeting me with love and greeting everybody with love. People were coming up to our dorm and getting autographs and stuff like that. It was kind of surreal when we got here, the fan love, but just the bond that we were able to create this year was amazing. In one year, you usually don't get teams really connected like that, usually it's two or three years, but we bonded really quick.

Coach Pope brought together guys I will call brothers for the rest of my life. I'm grateful God gave me the opportunity to be around these people.

**Q. Lamont, the competition you had against Ziegler today, two of the best point guards, you and he. Both of you had excellent games. Tell me about the competition level getting ready to play Ziegler.**

LAMONT BUTLER: Yeah, he's one of the best point guards in the country. Tonight, he played well, as he's been doing all year. Congrats to him and the team to going on further in the tournament, but it's a great matchup. I felt like I held my own. And to go out there and compete, at the end of the day, that's all I could ask for.

**Q. Mark, you built this roster from scratch the way you did to get to this point so quick. What's next to get back here and beyond this point?**

MARK POPE: It's just being relentless about it, just what these guys did to set an incredible foundation, giving us a great beginning. They set a really high standard. They set a high standard on the court, and a higher standard in the locker room and off the floor. They set an incredibly high standard representing the University of Kentucky, representing BBN and representing this jersey, and I'm grateful for that.

That standard will carry us for a long time. We'll be talking about these guys ten years from now as the guys that came in here and set a standard of what this is supposed to be, how you're supposed to carry yourself as a Kentucky basketball player, how you're supposed to connect yourself with your teammates. We'll set this as a standard for the future. I'm very proud of these guys.

What was done has never been done before actually. In so many ways, it's never been done before and it's because they're really, really, really special, special young men.

**Q. Mark, you and some of your players throughout the**

**year kept saying that you thought that God had a purpose for this team, and I would see, occasionally, someone say God doesn't care who wins a basketball game. And you'd say, I think you're missing a point. What is the point you guys are talking about there?**

MARK POPE: Man, this could be a long answer. I'll keep it brief. I do believe that God has a plan for our lives. I do believe God brought all of us together with this extraordinary group. I think he brought us together so each of us individually could grow. I think he brought us together so we could build relationships that are going to last forever. I'm pretty sure one of these guys will be slumming at my house some time in the next years. I don't know who it's going to be.

I think that these guys have had an incredible impact. They've gone out of their way to have an incredible impact on BBN and the state of Kentucky and the community around them, whether it's been their regular hospital visits or Ronald McDonald House visits, or meeting with fans before or after games, finding other ways to serve, and serving each other. I think this group was brought together to serve best they can. And these guys did it in an incredible fashion. We didn't finish the job, which is a real thing.

But short of that, you couldn't ask one more thing from these guys in how they serve, the standard they set, and how much of themselves they have given to this jersey and this community.

**Q. Certainly you have been a head coach before, but obviously, not under this spotlight of Kentucky. Given that most humans in situations have that voice of self-doubt that pops up every now and again, was there anything during the course of this season that you kind of proved to yourself in being the head coach at UK?**

MARK POPE: That's an interesting question. I heard this the other day, and I actually think it's true and these guys have been incredible examples of this, something that goes like this: If the spotlight on you is brighter than the light that comes from within you, then it'll destroy you. A roundabout way to answer your question, these guys have an amazing light coming out of each of them. At the end of the day, it's not about them. I feel the same way. It's not about us. I think that's the space where we live.

And so when you live that way, of course we all have doubts every single day, we do, but when it's about something more important than just ourselves, man, those doubts seem to blur a little bit, and you just spend all your time trying to figure out how we're supposed to make a

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difference, how it's supposed to be, how we're supposed to serve, how we're supposed to make an impact. That's what these guys have done, man.

What they did on the basketball court is incredible, but what they did for each other and this community is bigger and it's going to last longer and mean more.

So, I don't know. I think the doubt gets swallowed up in that, I really do. Of course we have doubts every single day, but they're minimal.

THE MODERATOR: We have a couple more minutes. Please raise your hand. Any further questions?

LAMONT BUTLER: Can I say something? I think it's really cool we were able to set the culture for Pope's first year. And people have to come in and the bar going to be set high for the next people who come under Pope. It's gonna be fun to watch for sure

ANDREW CARR: If you're in the transfer portal and looking for a place to go, go to Kentucky. I'll tell you that much. Go to Kentucky.

MARK POPE: We were arguing at shoot-around today, as these guys took turns sitting in the one stool on the court about which of these guys was going to be head coach first. It's going to be a race.

LAMONT BUTLER: Andrew Carr for sure.

MARK POPE: Thank you, guys.

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