

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday March 11, 2017

**Avery Johnson**  
**Braxton Key**  
**Corban Collins**  
**Dazon Ingram**  
Alabama

Kentucky - 79, Alabama - 74

THE MODERATOR: We're ready to continue with Alabama. We'll ask Coach Johnson for some opening thoughts of the game and take questions for the three student-athletes and then finish up with Coach. So would you begin?

COACH JOHNSON: First of all, I'm awfully proud of our team. We had a tough second half. We battled, we fought. We put on our hard hat and came to play. Body language was great. Attitudes were great. Our guys came to play and there was no surrender. We battled all the way to the very end.

Give Kentucky credit. They made some big shots. Malik made some timely 3s. Willis made a 3, Fox got inside of our defense a little too much. Give them credit. Coach Calipari does a nice job with his team, and getting so many new guys every year, they do a great job of representing the SEC both in conference and non-conference in the tournament.

But again, I wouldn't trade my guys for anybody. They have battled and fought. We've had some ups and downs in non-conference, conference, but they kept on returning to practice and watching videos and working on their games and trying to get better so that when we got to this point in the SEC Tournament, we could win a few games and have a chance to win the third one.

These three guys up here, Braxton and Corban and Daz, I wouldn't trade them. They played their hearts out in this game. Today we just came up short.

**Q. Dazon, I know it's always difficult to lose, but how much fun is it playing against players such as talented ones like De'Aaron Fox and Malik Monk?**



DAZON INGRAM: It's always good to play against the best. It's a challenge, you challenge yourself, and you always want to go up against the best.

**Q. This is for also for Dazon, you were terrific I thought all three games this week. You really seemed to gain a lot of confidence offensively. What's been the difference for you as far as just raising your game?**

DAZON INGRAM: My coaches and my teammates, they just want me to take more shots, and I gave up a few that I should have shot. But they had a terrific amount of confidence in me, and so I was just able to come out and play.

**Q. This is for Braxton, early in the game there was a goal tend call, looked like it could have went either way, a no-call. Also the fans for Kentucky, the whole stadium was packed. Did it feel like it was you guys against the world?**

BRAXTON KEY: For sure. The fans travel deep. They have a good fan base. I don't know about the call, but it was a good game. Our guys fought. Can't complain.

**Q. For Corban, late in the game they really seemed to spread the floor and just have Fox go one-on-one. I know were you in some foul trouble at the time. What were the difficulties in trying to defend that?**

CORBAN COLLINS: Fox is an electric player. He can come down here with a full -- with that type of speed coming at you, it's difficult to guard. But, I mean, I felt like we was in a good position. He made a couple tough shots, couple and 1s, but we battled. We tried to stay in front of him. We did what we're supposed to do as far as the game plan went. He made a couple tough shots, and 1s. He's a good player. Got to give him credit for that.

**Q. This is for Avery.**

THE MODERATOR: Just the players.

**Q. For the players as well. Was the goal to kind of lock-down, I guess, maybe the front court and give -- I guess the guards maybe some more freedom? If you guys close down the front court, you would have a chance knowing their guard playing is probably the strongest aspect.**

COACH JOHNSON: I'll answer that question. The plan was never to give Monk and Fox any points. There was not a plan to give them 50 points. They're NBA players. So, they just had a great night and they're talented players. My guys battled those guys. Unfortunately, when we're in their face, they made some tough shots.

**Q. Braxton, obviously big night last night but struggled earlier I guess 0-6 in the first half. What was going wrong, you couldn't get a groove early?**

BRAXTON KEY: The ball didn't go in the basket. I mean, just one of those nights. I thought I got some good looks. If the ball felt -- when it came off my hand, it felt like it was going in. It just rolled out.

THE MODERATOR: Okay, fellas, we'll excuse you back to the locker room. Thanks. We'll continue on.

**Q. Coach, obviously there's going to be disappointment after every loss, but in the locker room to have that kind of disappointment after playing Kentucky so well, what does that say about, you know, the progress of the program and going forward being able to play Kentucky this close?**

COACH JOHNSON: We didn't show up today necessarily for a moral victory, but that's a great question. Our guys played hard. We played them several times since I've been here as Coach of Alabama and came up short. This was probably one of our better performances. This performance in particular could have won us a few more games even during the SEC regular season against other teams, but we just didn't mature enough at the right time, didn't have the right type of focus, too many careless turnovers.

But, yeah, we had to play a little bit better down the stretch. It was a 3-point game and go to the free throw line and don't convert. We missed three out of four free throws at a critical juncture in the game, but our guys wanted those free throws to go in. They, unfortunately, didn't go in, even with the games that Monk and Fox had. You know, if you would have told me under three minutes it will be a one possession game against Kentucky, I'd take it.

**Q. Coach, condolences, first of all, and just sort of describe the emotion. It has to have been an emotional 24 hours for you. Take us through some of that.**

COACH JOHNSON: It's really been an emotional ten days because -- what he's talking about, my college basketball coach passed away yesterday at 6:07. But he was admitted to the hospital ten days ago, and, you know it was pretty much touch and go from the time he

arrived in the hospital. Fortunately, his daughter Benet said that he was alert to watch our game against Mississippi State and he watched the first half of our game yesterday before things took a turn for the worse.

Special man, pioneer in basketball. Mentor. He was on campus about four, five weeks ago, we had lunch, and he came to practice and talked to the guys. You know, he had a great sense of humor and bunch of stories about me. Not all of them are true.

Yeah, this has been very emotional for me and -- but no more than it is for his family. We send all of our love and condolences to his family.

**Q. Coach, 19 wins for the second year in a row. Got into the post-season last year. What is your hope for tomorrow night as far as hearing? Do you feel like there's a chance you could get in and get a home game?**

COACH JOHNSON: We hope because of the way we finished the season, I know a lot -- the NCAA Tournament, the NIT, they look at how you finish and, you know, we think we finished this tournament at a high level. You know, I don't think our teams were light years apart in terms of the game we've all just witnessed. I'm hopeful that if our resume isn't good enough to make it to the NCAA Tournament that we'll be one of the top teams in the NIT and have a chance to maybe host a game.

Our Athletic Director and I talked about it. Our RPI is a little bit higher than last year when we played Creighton. We need that game and hopefully we'll get selected because our seniors, we want them to play more and our underclassmen, they need some more experience.

**Q. Coach, I know you're still focused on this post-season, but given the amount of guys that are coming back next year, the class you have coming in, would Alabama fans be right in thinking that this tournament performance could be sort of a launching point for something bigger next year?**

COACH JOHNSON: Absolutely. If you look at improvement, you know, we were one of the better road teams in the SEC. We improved on the road. We've won two games in the SEC Tournament. You've seen a lot of our young guys as they, you know, matriculated through the season, they got better. You know, right now I don't want to talk as much about next year because it would do a disservice to the guys that are in the locker room in tears and heart broken about this loss.

But, at the same time, you combine a lot of guys that are going to return next year with that class, you may

be talking about a Top 25 team ranked in the preseason, possibly, which that hasn't happened in awhile at Alabama.

family. We're all in it together. We think that's been the one thing that clicked for us especially late in the season.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

**Q. Coach, in the postgame after the UK loss in Tuscaloosa, you talked about the team being on its heels, but today they seemed to be locked in from the start and coaching is teaching. Talk about how much progress this team has made offensively. You talked about it being the merging offensive team. They got to be disappointed with the result today but excited to keep playing, I would think.**

COACH JOHNSON: If we would have shot 75 percent in game one from the free throw line, it could have been a different story. Now our defense wasn't as good, especially in the second half. They got away from us a little bit today from Monk and Fox because they're talented. The future is bright for Alabama, you know. We had so many of our fans follow us here to Nashville and I hear from a lot of them via social media and the inspiration, not ones that jumped off the wagon when we lost to Georgia at home or obviously wanted it -- obviously one of our more disappointing losses we've had at home against our in-state rival. For the people who understand where we're going, they really -- we've inspired a group of fans and brought some new fans to Alabama basketball. We reenergized some fans that have been a part of the program for 10, 20, 30 years. They can actually see that we're going somewhere. We're excited yet disappointed about this loss. There's no moral victories. We hate losing more than we love winning. We finally got to that point in the season, and that's why they responded in these first two games and also much of this game.

THE MODERATOR: Last question.

**Q. Avery, in the last game against Kentucky you said that you felt like that was a very, very winnable game and yet you came out on your heels and you said you needed to do a better job of coaching them up. Today, did you also feel like that was a winnable game, and what have you done over the last month to be able to coach them up so well?**

COACH JOHNSON: Yeah. I have a really good staff. You know, when you talk about Coach "Bible" who is sitting right behind you, Coach Pettway, Coach Pelfrey, those guys work hard. They know how to problem solve. Working with the staff that we have and we -- we all support each other, we have great chemistry. The players feed off of that. They understand that we're one unit and as we work with those young men as a staff, breakdown drills, video sessions, you can just see incremental improvements everyday and they allow us to coach them and whatever voices we're using or teaching voice, motivational voice, intense voice, they allow us to coach them. We all have one