

# Southeastern Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday March 10, 2018

## Avery Johnson

## John Petty

## Collin Sexton

Alabama

Kentucky - 86, Alabama - 63

AVERY JOHNSON: First of all, I'm so unbelievably proud of our guys. When we got on the plane to come to St. Louis, there are a lot of unknowns about kind of our future, especially in the NCAA Tournament, but the perseverance that they've showed this year and especially over the last 48, 72 hours, for what I'm told, we've played ourselves hopefully in the tournament.

But I'm proud of them. They've persevered. They've showed a lot of character, togetherness, teamwork. We've got guys diving on the floor for balls more than we ever have, taking charges, moving the ball on offense, getting the ball to the hot player. So I can go on and on.

Give Kentucky credit. They shot the lights out of it. Gabriel had a career night from behind the three-point line. We were a little bit better offensively in the second half. We struggled a little bit in the first half. But give them credit. Cal does a really good job with his young guys. We both have young teams.

I thought -- not making the excuse, we just didn't have the energy in the first half like we normally have. I don't know if it's because we played three in a row. We're a pretty well-conditioned team. But it just took us a while to get in gear today.

But I'm awfully proud of our guys. We got a lot of basketball left in us.

**Q. For both players, playing three games in three days, how much of a toll does that take, especially against a tough and physical team like Kentucky?**

COLLIN SEXTON: I feel like it takes a little bit of toll on us, on our bodies. But we have a good trainer who makes sure that our bodies are good to continue to play at the high level that we play at and compete. So I feel like we'll be all right.



JOHN PETTY: Just like Coach said, we're a well-conditioned team. But it did take a little toll on us, three games back to back versus three great teams. But like he said, we've still got a lot of basketball left.

**Q. John, you've sort of been struggling to find your shot away from home, and then in the second half it seemed to come to you. Any reason that it did, and is it something that can carry over into next week?**

JOHN PETTY: I had a bad few games where I shot the ball well. But as a shooter, every shooter going to go through a drought. Every shooter has bad games. So I just kept my confidence and just kept shooting and doing what Coach told me, and it finally came to me.

**Q. Collin, just how much of a difference do you feel like it made not having Donta in there? And how much of a difference when Donta isn't in there?**

COLLIN SEXTON: I feel like Donta is a big part of our offense as well as our defense because he blocks shots. Also, when he gets the rebounds, he throws it to us and runs the floor. I feel like he helps both ends of the floor. Without him, it's pretty tough. But Galin and Alex Reese and Daniel, they all stepped up tonight, but we just came up short.

**Q. Collin, I'm sure this is disappointing today, but how would you sum up the three days in St. Louis for yourself and your team?**

COLLIN SEXTON: Honestly, I feel like, if it wasn't for my teammates giving me the ball in the right areas and having the confidence in me, then all my personal success probably wouldn't have been here. So I feel like all the credit goes to them and the coaches.

**Q. Coach, what did the doctors tell you about Donta, and what can you share with us and what's his condition?**

AVERY JOHNSON: He's in a concussion protocol. We think that he's going to be okay, but he's resting. He spent some time in the locker room. Then he came out at the end and tried to fire the guys up a little bit on the bench. Fortunately, he's going to be fine. He's responded well, but he's day-to-day right now.

**Q. First, a followup on Donta. Is it fair to say that you guys have almost a week before we would play**

again, that there's optimism that he would be available for the NCAA Tournament?

AVERY JOHNSON: Yeah, we're very optimistic.

**Q. And second question, they finished 85 percent from the field in the second half. When's the last time, if ever, that you dealt with a team getting that hot during the course of a game?**

AVERY JOHNSON: We got hot in our last game in the second half, and we played outstanding basketball. They got hot in the second half today and made a lot of threes. Sometimes you've just got to take your hats off to them. I don't know if I've ever coached against a guy that's got seven from the three-point line on any level.

But we were scrambling. We cut the lead down to about nine or ten points at one point. They kept us on our heels by making threes. And sometimes we were there in their faces, and sometimes we weren't. But I like the way offensively we got going a little bit in the second half. We just didn't have much offense. Our energy wasn't at a high level of where we needed it to be in the first half to compete in this game.

**Q. Coach, overall, how do you assess your team's play this tournament and where that leaves you for a potential tournament game down the road?**

AVERY JOHNSON: You know what, after we won the first game, and especially -- I'm going back to the first game when we were up by 12. Sure, we turned the ball over, and they got back in the game and obviously took the lead. But at this point, I really thought in the back of my mind we could win the SEC tournament. I just thought, if we could just get enough energy and get some help off of our bench, that we'll have a shot.

Then, boy, yesterday with that game, the way we dominated our opponent, especially after losing to them on the road, I was thinking, man, I think we got something.

But Donta, we could have used him today. That's a guy that will get you 14 points and 10 or 11 rebounds and 5 blocked shots. They were missing Vanderbilt. But I just didn't think we were going to be as slow offensively as we were, especially against a really good defensive team. But I'm really encouraged by what I saw with our team today. I'm really, really, really encouraged.

I talked to them about the old coach Jim Valvano after the game. I talked to them about his speech at the ten-year anniversary of their 1983 team, and he talked about how their team had a lot of hope. They had big dreams, they loved each other, but more than anything, they persevered. I told them I'm proud of them for persevering.

**Q. I don't know if you heard, but looking to a reaction. Mark Fox got let go by Georgia today.**

AVERY JOHNSON: Oh, really? No, I didn't hear that.

**Q. Any thoughts on that?**

AVERY JOHNSON: Good man. Good coach. Yeah, very disappointing. When you come into the SEC like I did three years ago, even though we all try to win recruiting battles and we want to win on the floor, there's a little bit of a brotherhood with the coaches. We spend time two or three times a year at SEC meetings and media days. Obviously, we're on the road at all of these tournaments. Sometimes when you can go visit these high schools, you form a bond.

I have a really good relationship with Cal. People say, well, why? Why not? I had a great relationship with Nick Saban, who called me before I came on this trip and gave me one really good point about our team. Why not?

But I'm disappointed for Mark, but I'm sure he'll bounce back. I'm sure he'll bounce back because he's a good man and he's a really good basketball coach.

**Q. Coach, you talked about being encouraged. Was part of that the way they got after them at the press in the second half?**

AVERY JOHNSON: But I was really encouraged with our practice before we came here. It was very spirited. We had an energy in that first game, like I hadn't seen before. The way we ran on the break. We got beat up on the boards. And then to be able to win that game and win on yesterday and the way we fought back in the second half.

We had some guys, like Petty, who had been struggling. A.J. Jr. struggled yesterday, and they gave us some good production off the bench there with that run, and that's a positive.

But our team, they gave us everything they had. Sometime, even when you do, you come up short. But I think we're well positioned. We haven't -- not a flawless resume. There's nobody in the country, I think, that has a flawless resume, but, boy, we got some outstanding wins, outstanding wins, and we've played in some tough environments. And basically, everything that the committee said was the criteria for being one of the 68 teams, we think we've met the criteria. So we'll see what happens.

**Q. Just wanted to follow up on what you said about Coach Saban. What was the advice that he gave you?**

AVERY JOHNSON: That's private. I'm not going to

share that with you.

**Q. Just thought I'd try.**

AVERY JOHNSON: Good try, but that's totally private. I just want to keep our conversations private. But he's been very helpful in so many ways. Miss Terry has been helpful to my wife.

You know, you find out a lot about everybody when you're in a losing streak. You really do find out about everybody. You find out about your friends. You find out about your family. You find out about people in the state, out of the state, alumni, fans, donors, supporters. You find out, man, when you're in a tough stretch. And we have a group of people that's in our inner circle, of which coach is one of them, that's just behind us through thick and thin. Yes, they want us to win every game.

But Greg Byrne, he's been in the foxhole with me since he arrived, and that's a great feeling, man, when you have many directors behind you. He calls me all the time during the losing streak, and our president Dr. Bell was showing up at games, even when we weren't playing great, and I can keep going on and on. That's what a family is about. That's what a marriage is about. I've been with my wife almost 27 years, and every day is not Sunday. Okay? (Laughter). Or Sunday or sunny. Sometimes it's partly cloudy, rain, thunderstorms, but you've got to hang in there.

That's what I love about our team, our coaching staff, our administration, and people that really care deeply about what we're trying to build.