

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 14, 2025

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Memphis Tigers Penny Hardaway PJ Haggerty Dain Dainja

Postgame Press Conference

Memphis - 83, Wichita State - 80

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

PENNY HARDAWAY: For me it's just thank God for this W. We knew it was going to be the hardest game because we've been off a week. This was their third game, I think, since Sunday. Sunday, Tuesday, and today -- or Sunday, Wednesday, and today. My days are off, so excuse me. Three games.

So we figured we would be a little rusty coming out in the first half, and, man, they came out shooting the ball well. But at the end of the day, we regained composure and pulled off a great win.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. I know you probably wanted this to go a bit better, but still 365 days ago today you lose to Wichita State here in this tournament and now you've beaten them. You've kind of gotten that revenge there. What kind of goes through your mind when you think about that?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Well, it's a little weird because you're playing the same team that beat you the previous year, and they were very capable of beating us again this year, so you go into the game with a little jitters, but you go in prepared. So at the end of the day, we just wanted to survive and advance and that's what we did. We knew it was going to be a tough game.

Q. We saw PJ put on one of the all-time greatest



performances in this tournament's history just now. What's going through your mind as he's getting bucket after bucket and was that kind of what you told him to do when your offense got stagnant, like, Hey, go out and put the team on your back?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, I talked to him yesterday about that similar situation because I was in his shoes. When you're the man and you're expected to go out and produce, you got to go out and produce. There's no excuses this time of year. Your team wins when you play well. You don't play well, your team loses. So at the end of the day, that's the pressure that you have to have on yourself as being the man, and he responded exceptionally well. Just watching it, it just took me back. Like, Hey, this is what you have to do. You got to carry your team. You got to make plays for yourself and for your teammates.

Q. (No audio.)

PENNY HARDAWAY: No, I wasn't shocked because I know his abilities. His abilities are from God. That's something that you can't teach. His knack for scoring, his knack for making plays, that's all about God, and I'm not shocked at all.

Q. PJ, was there a moment where you knew you had it tonight? Was there one moment where you knew you had it today?

PJ HAGGERTY: I would say, yeah, the first half, I got a couple buckets back-to-back. Seeing the rim was opening up a little bit for me, shots went in. We expanded the lead. But, yeah, I think throughout the whole game, I was just trying to find a feel for where I could get my shots at. I think last time we lost, an upsetting feeling, so I didn't want that to happen again.

Q. PJ, can you talk about that 12-0 run where you had nine of the points, including the two baskets off turnovers, and just kind of what that meant for this game to go ahead at that point?

PJ HAGGERTY: Yeah, I was just trying to play my

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hardest. It's March. It's win or go home. I'm not trying to go home, so at the end of the day, I just try to play my hardest, do what I can to do to win.

Q. Dain, with the play being so choppy with all the stoppages with the call, how could you get into a flow when it's always just stopping and going? Could you get into a flow with all the stoppages?

DAIN DAINJA: Yeah, I knew it was a lot of stoppage, but I knew just at the end of the day, we had to get stops, and we had to lock in defensively, especially in the second half. So it really wasn't even about offense for us. We just have to get stops to get the win.

Q. Dain, how certain were you about being able to come back at halftime and what did you do at halftime to loosen up the shoulder or whatever? What was it that you did? And Penny, how important was it to you to get him back on the floor in the second half?

DAIN DAINJA: Yeah, I got a little banged up. I just got it wrapped up. I knew I had to be in the game, so I knew I had to play, so I just got it wrapped up. I'm all good, though.

PENNY HARDAWAY: For me, it was very important to get him back because he's a weapon. Sometimes we don't use him as much as we should. I have to do a better job of that. 12 touches isn't enough. He needs to get 20, 25 touches, and then he has to make plays from the area. And I'll do better with that because we need these two guys to be the leaders, and then everyone else follow for the rest of this weekend.

Q. What did you think of the goal tend that went against Ballard down the stretch that would have cut the deficit to two? Did you think that was a goal tend or did you think you guys were maybe fortunate to have that go your way?

PENNY HARDAWAY: No, the way I looked at it, I thought the ball was still on the rim a little bit. He didn't let it fully come off. That's what he does well. And just an unfortunate situation for them and a good one for us. It's just I felt like it was still on the rim.

Q. Dain, watching what PJ did today what was that like and what was going through your head watching what he was doing?

DAIN DAINJA: Special. Man, he's one of the best guards in the country. I wasn't surprised at all. I know he can take over games like this. When he gets going, we just got to find him.

Q. For either of you, playing Wichita, obviously, PJ, you mentioned it, losing to them last time, was that extra motivation? I feel like at the end of the game you got that one back.

PJ HAGGERTY: For sure. We went down there. They beat us fair and square. At the end of the day, we got another chance to change the result.

Q. I know those two guys were your stars, but you had contributions from others, like PJ Carter. Talk about the contributions the little things the other guys did to help secure the win.

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, well, first of all, you talk about Baraka Okokjie. He came into the game, he and PJ Carter. I'll talk about Baraka first. The energy was electric because we didn't have the energy in the starting lineup again with pressuring the ball, and he came right in, pressured the ball and then pushed tempo. And then PJ Carter came in and did the exact same thing and Moussa, those three guys are our energy coming off the bench and they kind of sparked that run to get us back in, because we had gotten down 10 points.

Q. In terms of what you said you talked to PJ about and putting it on him, and also with Dain getting more touches, how much is this week kind of dress rehearsal, if you will, for next week, and how much more the importance of that is amplified?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Unfortunately, we don't get to have dress rehearsals here in Memphis. There's no such thing as dress rehearsals, it's all real. Because we have to play our hardest and win every game, and then we'll see where it lies on Sunday. We just got to keep fighting. We're not disrespecting anybody here, but we can never just sit back and go, Let's go out and play, and then we're still going to be in the NCAA Tournament. We want to win everything. We have short-term goals, but we don't have any time to do dress rehearsals.

Q. Do you really think that you still have something to prove here? Are you not confident that you're in no matter what?

PENNY HARDAWAY: I know we're in, but the competitive nature, you're always hunting greatness. You're always hunting greatness. We're never going to settle. That's from our AD, with the swag over there, you can see him, to our school, to our head coaches, our coaches, and our players. We want to, we have the competitive nature to fight, and we never want to lose. We want to go into every situation winning. We want to win.

Q. PJ, I saw you waving away to Wichita State after y'all beat them. I know it's a close game, a lot of emotions, is that indicative of the rivalry or how you feel about that team, because I know they beat you before this season.

PJ HAGGERTY: No, last game when they was up winning and they won, they was talking like kind of crazy. We got that get back. So, like, we got to talk back, you feel me? That's all it was. It's all love though. Good game with them, but at the end of the day we won.

Shout out, Memphis fans, we love you all, keep supporting. That's all I got to say.

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