

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 15, 2025

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Memphis Tigers
Penny Hardaway

Dain Dainja

PJ Haggerty

Moussa Cisse

Postgame Press Conference

Memphis - 78, Tulane - 77

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: Yeah, first and foremost for me, to God be the glory. Thank God for the opportunity to get this W. That is 28 wins, which is really amazing.

To Temple -- I mean -- I said Temple. Sorry. To Tulane, they did a phenomenal job today. They had a great game plan going and took us to the wire.

To my guys, I'm super proud of them because we hit adversity today and we withstood the storm and got a great victory. Dain, unbelievable job all day, except for his free throws. He's never shot free throws this badly, but, man, what a phenomenal game from him.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Is this, like, a bittersweet win with Hunter, not knowing his status going forward?

PENNY HARDAWAY: No, it's sweet. It's all the way around sweet because we're going to take advantage of our good play. I mean, we feel like we put ourselves in position and we're not going to -- things happen in the game. Definitely we don't know what's going on with Tyrese, so hopefully, it's not for the worst.

But I'm happy for those guys because they have been



working so hard for these moments.

Q. You guys left double-digit points on the board across the roster on the free throws, so how do you guys plan to address that tomorrow and then beyond?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, this is the first time we've had this problem all year. Obviously, we're in the tournament, so it's back-to-back, more minutes on the legs. And again, I haven't seen these guys shoot free throws this poorly, especially Dain being 3-13. But he just needs to keep going to the line and keep shooting them. I trust him. He made them yesterday and didn't make them today. That's probably from a little fatigue. And then his shoulder. He had a shoulder injury yesterday that he's playing through and maybe that had a little bit to do with it as well. But I'm not going to panic over this. We missed 15 free throws but still got victory.

Q. When Tyrese went out, what was that adjustment like for you and what did you want the guys to do differently?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, you lose one of your best defenders and your vocal leader, but I knew that we had guys on the bench that could step up and step in. Moussa, phenomenal today, came in and really guarded really well, protected the rim, got some key rebounds, did a phenomenal job. Baracka, PJ. We got next-man-up mentality and when he went down, I didn't know how severe it was, but I knew there was guys on the bench that could come in and do their jobs, and they did.

Q. When you have so much that goes so wrong, whether it's the free throws or the three-point shooting, losing Hunter, to have the resiliency to respond to that what does it tell you about what you have? You touched on it a little bit yesterday and even today now, but, like, what are you going to have to rely on bench-wise and from other people besides PJ or Dain when those circumstances come up going down the road here?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, we always talk about

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hanging our hat on defense. At the end of the day, you got to stop people, right? We got stops today and we got an opportunity to have a win. Our team is built 1 through 13 to be ready to play and be ready for war. So when one guy goes down, the next guy is going to step up. That's all the way down to Jared Harris, you know, and Damarion Yates. Those guys are ready to play right now.

So at the end of the day, we have to keep playing and we got guys on the bench that are very capable.

Q. Moussa, during the long review for the goal tending call what were you thinking and how confident were you that it was going to be reversed?

MOUSSA CISSE: I was pretty confident. I know that that was a block because my timing was right. I let him drive on purpose so I could time it to block it, so I know it was a block that was solid on my part.

Q. Dain, you obviously walked off the court, I think, shortly after Tyrese did with a foot-type problem. What's going on there and how do you feel now?

DAIN DAINJA: I feel fine. It's just my ankle, it felt kind of funny, but I'm fine.

Q. The shoulder, same thing? Is it better?

DAIN DAINJA: Yeah, yeah. It felt a little better today, yeah.

Q. Obviously you've said it before, that your guys have withstood these ticky-tack injuries throughout the season and sat out practices but not missed games, but to have these blows now, I guess how frustrating is that? And to look forward, what's the status on Dante Harris? Do you expect to get him back sometime soon?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, it's weird, but it happens to a lot of different teams, right? You just saw Cooper Flagg go down for Duke. It just happens. No time is a good time, but especially in March when it's coming to an end, like, when the season is about to go into the NCAA Tournament. Again, it's just part of the sport and you just understand that. It's frustrating when you see that because you have to have some luck. I heard Josh Pastner say, You have to have some luck to go through this tournament without having any injuries along while playing well, and we just have the injury bug right now.

Q. PJ, how good of a feeling to have that you have two players that almost had double doubles with you so you don't have the pressure on you every day. How is

that relieving for you, not having that pressure on you to score every point?

PJ HAGGERTY: Early Dain was killing, so we just kept feeding him. Moussa had some big-time plays, defense and offense. It's just what our team is built upon, meaning if I'm not going, we got other people that can get going, as you've seen, and we just played hard throughout the stretch, we just stay focused, and got the win.

Q. PJ, can you recap the possession where you went to the floor, it was right after Moussa's block, they inbound the ball, you poke it loose but not completely loose, then you're trying to get a jump ball -- obviously you guys had the possession arrow. You're trying to get a jump ball. Eventually you just rip it out. I mean, I don't know if -- it felt like one of the plays of the game was a defensive play from a guy who scored 42 points yesterday. Can you recap that for us, that whole sequence?

PJ HAGGERTY: Yeah, I kind of seen the play they was running, the inbound to the touchback, so I kind of just jumped the gun. He really wasn't ready for it, and I seen the ball, so I just tried to go for the ball. Like I said, it's March. I'm just trying to win, do whatever it takes to win. If it's defense, offense, that's just what I'm going to do.

Q. You touched on it already, but Tyrese going down today, Dante's been out for a little bit now, the backcourt is -- and especially that point guard rotation is really starting to thin there. What's the concern with that on your part moving forward?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Obviously the concern is foul trouble. If you get into foul trouble, who do you go to? But at the end of the day, we have other guys that can substitute in and play the point guard. We're well equipped. Dain can bring the ball up the floor and run the offense through the 5 out. So we'll make the adjustments and the guys that are on the bench are going to be ready to play.

Q. Dain, you've experienced March before. What does it tell you when not everything is going right, whether it's you at the line or other people around you, but then everything comes together despite all of that? What does it tell you about the makeup of what you have?

DAIN DAINJA: Yeah, just the little things, little things we talk about all the time, just getting the stops, helping each other out defensively, talking to each other, just having the next-play mentality.

Q. For all four of you, when you look at the American



Conference, it's one that's been almost trashed in a way around the nation in some ways and in Memphis. We see another close game, another really hard-fought game between you guys, Coach. What is it about this league, in your opinion, that makes this just such a competitive one?

PENNY HARDAWAY: I think it's the transfers that we have in this league. You're getting guys from high majors coming and transferring into this league. If you look at these rosters, these guys are transferring from Georgetown, Indiana, Missouri, Miami. So it's not like this league is terrible. It's just, you know, our non-conference scheduling and how we lose in the non-conference, maybe that kind of gets them going.

But by the time it hits January these teams are ready to play. And it's a very physical league. It reminds me of the Big Ten because it's all about bare-knuckle fighting. Every single night you got to bring your hard hat, and that's what's so tough about this league.

Q. With Dante Harris, is there an update on his status?

PENNY HARDAWAY: No update right now that I can say. We'll just have to see. They're working three times a day on Dante. Obviously the way he plays, as explosive and fast as he is and how he pushes off, it's going to have to be 100 percent for him to come back. He can't be out there hobbling. So I can't call it for next week, but I know he's not going to play tomorrow.

Q. Speaking of tomorrow, there's a championship game and you guys are in it. How does that feel to be playing for a championship tomorrow?

PENNY HARDAWAY: It feels great. We've been in this championship game a lot since I've been here. We only won it once, but we've been in it enough to understand -- I have -- to understand how it works. And it's a blessing to be back here. We don't take anything for granted. Any time we can put ourselves in position to win championships, that's what we want to do. That was another short-term goal after we ended the season with winning the regular season that we wanted to win this tournament and we put ourselves in position to do so.

Q. Obviously I know you want to be cutting nets tomorrow, but you said it before, you have bigger goals in terms of the NCAA Tournament. With knowing that you guys are kind of banged up, tired, whatever it may be, and having to play maybe Thursday in the first round of the big dance, how do you approach tomorrow? A lot's been made about whether that will matter for seeding, whatnot, win,

lose, whatever, and so close to Selection Sunday?

PENNY HARDAWAY: I don't know if it will be for seeding but when you start winning championships you get greedy for the championship. So we want to win. We can rest the next couple days. We're going to go out with the mentality, and I'm sure I wouldn't let these guys down by saying anything differently, that we want to go out and win tomorrow. I'm not really worried about the NCAA Tournament until we get there. Right now our short-term goal after winning the regular season was to win this and we're in position.

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