

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Sunday, March 16, 2025

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

UAB Blazers

Andy Kennedy

Yaxel Lendeborg

Butta Johnson

Postgame Press Conference



ANDY KENNEDY: You know, you've covered every game and I appreciate that.

This group, man -- again, I've got it right here. We chart it. It's called clean looks, right shot by the right player at the right time. Now, when you're in the championship game against a top-20 team, not everything is going to be completely clean, but it's the right shot for the right guy.

On the season, in league play, this team is 40 percent. You need to be in the mid-50s. So we've just struggled with it all year. You know, Cisse and Dainja inside, they combined for 26 rebounds. They're a good players in there, man, getting those balls.

So in order to be able to overcome some of that, you're going to have to make some perimeter shots, and we have just struggled with it all year long. Then for us to have 15 turnovers, you know, the reason we got to the finals last year, the reason that we were able to win the championship, we had less than 15 in three games to capture the championship. We had 12, I believe, coming into today combined and we had 15 today. Those are things that you're just not going to be able to overcome against a team the quality of Memphis.

Q. Of those 15, do you think a lot of them were unforced?

ANDY KENNEDY: I think what Memphis does is they speed you up. I think they're fast. For instance, North Texas, physical. I think Memphis is physical, but they're fast. That was a very, very physical game, I think, and justifiably so. Man, I mean, Yax has carried this group for a long, long time, and I thought he ran out of gas a little bit. While the game was still a two-possession game, his inability to get through contact against those big bodies just because -- goodness, he's got a tired back. He's been carrying a lot of us.

Q. Yax, kind of on that note, did you feel like you got a little worn down in the second half?

YAXEL LENDEBORG: Yeah, I feel like I couldn't go, but I

Memphis - 88, UAB - 72

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

ANDY KENNEDY: Obviously not the -- as we hear the celebration going on behind us, it's not the seat that we wanted to be in. But congratulations to Memphis. When somebody beats you three times in a season, there's no argument. They were most certainly the better team and I think they were the best team in this league. So kudos to Penny and his crew.

I thought we were battling early. I never thought we really got comfortable. Some of that is them, some of that is us. I didn't think we got comfortable offensively. We were able to hang in the game, hang in the game, hang in the game, and then defensively I thought we were pretty connected. I thought we were very fortunate to be up at the half the way that we had played off the glass. They were crushing us off the offensive glass, which has unfortunately been a disturbing theme for us over the last month or so of the season.

But we hung in there, hung in there, and then when they made a spurt in the second half, we were unable to keep pace and at the end they just pulled away.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Do you feel like in the second half when you didn't have an answer to what they did, do you feel like you were getting some pretty good looks there?



had to, so I tried to push through it. But I -- it was hard to breathe. But, you know, I guess I got to get more in shape or if I get to play basketball next year and stuff, just figure it out.

ANDY KENNEDY: It's not that. I mean, think about this. Yax had played -- we had talked about it. PJ Haggerty and Dain Dainja as well. Yax plays tonight 39, Dainja 39, PJ 38. Those three guys play heavy minutes. Why? Because you want your good players on the floor. So he won't make an excuse. But I thought he didn't have quite the same pop.

And I thought -- again, I'll go back and watch the tape, but I thought we had some pretty clean looks where maybe we could have kept it within reach, put some game pressure on them. I didn't think in the last seven or eight minutes they had to feel much game pressure.

Q. I'm not even sure if you'll get a NIT bid or what's next, but with Yax, what has he meant to you and this program?

ANDY KENNEDY: You know what, man? I love both these kids to the left. Butta and Yax have been tremendous ambassadors for our university. They're good people, good players. They do the right thing the majority of the time. When we signed Yax, I went up -- and Steve Mitchell will be able to tell you this, Steve Mitchell, the all-time leading scorer in UAB history, for those of you that don't know, who does our radio, so he's right across the hall. I told Steve, I said, Man, I got this kid now and he's been here about two weeks. I said, He's got a chance to be one of the best players in the history of this program, because I believed it. And lo and behold he made me look like I know what I'm talking about for a change. I think he's one of the best that we've ever had in the green and gold. His ability to dribble, pass, and shoot at 6'9", 240 is going to put him in a position to be a very, very valuable commodity moving forward.

Q. Butta for you, just kind of what makes Memphis tough to play against? Kind of what -- you've lost to them three times this year, and you've been, the last two you've been in it, but just sort of what makes it tough to play against these guys?

BUTTA JOHNSON: I feel like size is a key factor, too. They're able to -- their front court, we have mainly three bigs, Yax, CC and Brad. And they got Nic, Dain, Cisse. And so just length and stuff like that can bother you offensively and defensively. And so we tried to just make as many adjustments as we can and, you know, I felt like the size and the group of guys, they play together well. So it's just, it was kind of hard to try to get them out of, get

them out of rhythm in anything that they do.

Q. You shot the ball well today, you often shoot the ball well. In big situations or big-time, big games, those type things, what is it about big games you think that you shoot the ball well or produce offensively?

BUTTA JOHNSON: I feel like big games I feel like I'm just prepared for the moment. I just thank God and my lord and savior Jesus Christ for allowing me to, in big games and big moments, to be able to come through. But also it's just the work that I put in, unseen hours and stuff. So I feel like in these big games and big moments my eyes get brighter, I feel like the rim gets bigger, and I feel like these type of moments it's just what I'm prepared for.

Q. Yax, what has these two years at UAB meant to you?

YAXEL LENDEBORG: It's been the world to me. I feel like AK really like just saved my life, to be honest, because coming out of Juco I was just expecting to come here and be a role player, just fill in whatever he needs. But he turned me into kind of a superstar. And next year I actually could have a chance of playing for the NBA, you know. And me, before I came down, I never would have thought that ever. His awesome belief in me really made me the player I am today and I'm very grateful and proud that I got to play for UAB for these last two years, so thank you and, yeah.

Q. When you think about that first game of the season opener to now, you wanted to see more pop from the guys, I ask, what is the most proudest thing from this season yet? We don't know what the future's going to hold for you guys, but what's the one thing you're most proud of this group?

ANDY KENNEDY: Last night when we met, and I think it's maybe the most valuable traits any of us can have, and that's the ability to persevere. Sounds easy sitting on a stage to talk about perseverance, but when you're in the middle of it, having the fortitude to keep moving forward when things are not going your way, these are very valuable traits. And I think this group epitomized that. We started off pretty rocky and we really didn't have much of an identity. And guys were thinking, Man, what has happened. Because the group that we had returning wanted to get back to this moment, and they forgot the journey that it takes to get back to this moment.

So we had some bumps along the road, but I'm just proud that these guys continued to battle and continued to move forward and put ourselves in a position on a big stage to try to go repeat as the tournament champion. Today Memphis

was the better team. They made the plays that are necessary. And I told them, they will be able to reiterate this. Again, I know this sounds crazy, I wanted to win as much as anybody. But I really, I think they deserved to win. They beat us in effort areas and they made more plays than us. I think that they deserved the opportunity to be champions, and not only in the regular season, but also in the conference tournament.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

