

American Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

Birmingham, Alabama, USA

Legacy Arena At The BJCC

Memphis Tigers

Coach Penny Hardaway

Dug McDaniel

Postgame Press Conference

Tulane 81, Memphis 69

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Memphis coach Penny Hardaway and player Dug McDaniel. Let you get situated and then maybe start with some general comments from you.

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yes, sir. I'm ready. I guess end to a very hard season for us. Not the way we planned this thing, especially after getting into the tournament.

Kudos to Tulane for coming in and making the adjustments. They played well. Seemed like they wanted it more than us. I still thank God for the experience with this team. Again, this team has been through so much and not to get what we wanted out of this thing is very disappointing, I understand it's very disappointing.

But still wish these young men well moving forward, the seniors, and looking forward to getting back to it next year.

Q. Bigger picture, what did you learn this year about, I don't know, player evaluations, the portal, getting the team together earlier to maybe avoid something like this in the future?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, you know, I had a totally different process a couple years ago, but at the end of the day, we weren't waiting on Dain. And even though PJ had gotten into the portal, still have to have your hopes for that, and trying to build a team as well.

The thing that you learn is that you really don't get to know these young men that much in a monetary world. It's a portal. You get a couple days to talk to a kid and you make a deal. It's basically a deal because you haven't recruited them. You don't get to know them and when you bring them together, you just hope it all meshes together with the



chemistry.

The year before, because we came off a season where we were ranked tenth in the nation and didn't get to the NCAA Tournament, we took our time and kind of went through when guys got in the portal, got what we wanted and got the team pretty fast.

Q. Coach, what are your -- like what's your order of business now that the season is over? What's the first three things on your agenda?

PENNY HARDAWAY: I would just say 1A, B, and C. Get with Ed and talk to Ed and go from there. We met last week; we'll meet again next week for sure.

Q. Can you share what you guys talked about last week?

PENNY HARDAWAY: No. Sorry.

Q. Do you want to share what you guys may talk about next week?

PENNY HARDAWAY: I really don't know until we get to that point. Not to be crazy or anything, but, no, it's just we just got to figure things out.

Q. The nature of the meeting last week, just in general terms was it productive?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Just finishing strong, finishing the season strong. We were on the edge of not even making the AAC tournament. Finish strong. That was the message.

Q. Penny, did you ever, as this thing was unraveling down the stretch of the season, did you ever feel like your seat was hot or your position was -- I don't want to call it in jeopardy but shaky?

PENNY HARDAWAY: I don't ever think like that because I understand I have to win games. My focus was really to make the AAC tournament. We were on a losing streak. I

was trying to do anything to stop the bleeding. That's not my way of thinking, of trying to think about what the administration is going to do.

I'm trying to win games, which is what I'm paid to do, and then just go from there.

Q. And speaking of this game in general, y'all were still in it with, what, 17, 16 minutes left, and then the thing broke up. What happened there when it slid the other way?

PENNY HARDAWAY: It's the same problems we've had pretty much all year. We start playing one-on-one basketball, not sharing the basketball and not defending. All our teams in the past has always defended. Defend to win is what we talk about and we shared a basketball.

We did a great job with Tulane because it was more desperation. I don't know if we got complacent coming here because we just won but once they got up eight, nine, ten points you could just tell guys started stressing trying to bring us back by themselves and not trusting teammates, and that's what's been the Achilles heel for us all year.

Q. Penny, you mentioned a couple years ago with DeAndre and Kendrick, that season; if you compare the sting of this season, if you will, compared to the disappointment of not making the tournament with a good team, does this one hurt any more?

PENNY HARDAWAY: The one with David Jones and Quinerly, that really hurt because we had one of the best teams in the country and, man, it imploded pretty badly. You could just tell every game guys were not locked in on what they needed to do.

This one hurts the same because I felt like we could have done more and we just never reached that level that we needed to reach to go out and compete on a nightly basis to win basketball games.

That's why we had so many losing streaks. We had a four-game losing streak earlier, a three-game, and then a seven-game. When you start doing that, it's just hard to figure out how to win games.

It all boils down to what you bring, getting out of your comfort level and buying in, believing in and buying into everything the staff is teaching.

Q. What does it take to get back into having a Kendrick-DeAndre team or a Quinerly-Jones team or whatever? In what can you change knowing what you can and can't control in the portal right now?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, there's processes now that you can take like we did a couple years ago. I can't say we missed on the talent. It's just the talent itself really didn't believe in the buy-in the entire time. We have done a great job over the last five or six years of just bringing talent, the last two team we had, last year and the year before.

So this is one year that it's just down in that area. It's not because of talent, it was the belief and the buy-in.

Q. Dug, what do you think the biggest on-the-court issues are throughout the season?

DUG McDANIEL: Obviously rebounding. That's something we struggled with overall. And like Coach said, just the overall buy-in. We got guys still fighting against their old habits they used to have coming from other places.

We have a lot of aggressive defenders and sometimes your aggression and your habits gets the best of you. I feel like if we took more advantage of buying in in the summer, understanding what they tried to teach us, I feel like we'd have put ourselves in a better position to utilize our aggression for the right things, you know, Rebounds, steals and stuff.

Just the overall buy-in, like Coach said. Just understanding what we're looking for in defense.

Q. I imagine conventional wisdom would say that after a season like this, some people might want to rip the Band-Aid completely off and just start with an entirely fresh roster, but at the same time, you had an entirely new roster this year. I think a lot of people think that's part of why you guys were in this position. Are there players on this team you want to retain for next year?

PENNY HARDAWAY: I'm not really going to talk about that right now, but with having 14 new players the year before, I think that's probably about the same, to be honest. Because Ashton has been here before, so it's basically like 14 new players.

It's just the belief in the buy-in. I really do believe that because last year's team believed in and bought in, but they had the leadership of Tyrese Hunter, Moussa Cisse, Dain Dainja, and Nick Jourdain, and making everything work.

I'm confident that they could happen again. This was just a down year in all areas.

Q. Coach, when you look at this season, you've had a

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

lot of instances where your team just goes on long scoring droughts. There's been some conversation about a GM potentially being brought in. How does a GM fix those issues for you moving into next season?

PENNY HARDAWAY: With the scoring drought, it's just to me that was shot selection, that was, again, not the buy-in of understanding how to move the basketball. Guys trying to put it on their own shoulders.

We had a lot of guys who could come in and score the basketball and sometimes that's dangerous because I've been there before where every guy feels like they're the guy and you're not making the extra pass.

I think just from understanding what GMs do around the country, they help you build a roster. They help you believe in a staff. They help you believe in everything and the buy-in of the kids that fit your system.

A lot of these young men came in with their own individual deals and didn't really understand what Memphis basketball was all about and they had to learn that when the season came about, and that's tough. That doesn't bode well. When you're known for being an aggressive team and you get guys that are not aggressive.

So, again, waiting on Dain and PJ last year, we tried to get it to work. We felt like we had a good enough roster to win, and we did, but the mindset just wasn't there.

Q. Penny, now that this is all over and you can put everything together, encapsulate it all, a seven-game losing streak, the worst record this over 56 years and barely making the conference tournament and going out the way you did today, is it fair to -- considering the expectations I'm sure you have and the program has, is it fair to characterize this season as a failure?

PENNY HARDAWAY: It was a failure for sure. You can't categorize it anywhere else, any other way. We didn't do what we needed to do. We failed.

But, again, you can come back from failure. There's been a lot of teams that have gone through this more than any and I'm the head of that failure. Couldn't get the guys to really believe in the buy-in every single game. We worked hard, we put guys in position, and then the guys have to go out there and take over from there because we can't go on the court.

But it was a failed season. Everything that you said was true. The worst record, seven-game losing streak, a couple four-game losing streaks. It was not a fun year when you're used to winning and used to taking a care of

non-conference scheduling and playing well in the conference. It was just a weird year.

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