

Maui Invitational presented by Novavax

Monday, November 25, 2024

Lahaina, Hawaii, USA

Lahaina Civic Center

Memphis Tigers Coach Penny Hardaway Tyrese Hunter Colby Rogers

Postgame Press Conference

Memphis 99, UConn 97 (OT)

PENNY HARDAWAY: What an unbelievable opportunity to be able to play the back to back national champions and then also win the game. It's so big for our city, for our school and for these young men so work so hard. We're riding them really tough because we have to get it right right now. We don't have the time to wait until conference starts because we have to do all our heavy lifting early and I put a ton of pressure on them to be better than where they should be quite now because they're still getting acclimated and getting to know each other.

Just an unbelievable feeling to be sitting here, doing the hard work that we put in, it's paying off, and these guys are getting the rewards, so I'm thankful for that. Thank God for that opportunity.

Q. Tyrese, just describe your feeling when you were kind of on fire out there in that stretch where you just felt like you couldn't miss.

TYRESE HUNTER: I mean, it felt good. I played these guys last year in New York, and I know the type of intensity that they were going to bring for the game, so I knew what to expect. But just being in that stretch and being in the flow, it felt good.

Q. Colby, you hit a three in overtime that tied the game and then I think you finished with eight or nine points in overtime. Describe how clutch that was for you.

COLBY ROGERS: Yeah, man, hit I think it was a three right before that possession, so first thing I'm thinking, they give me a chance to shoot a three, I'm going to take it, and



I just attacked, was aggressive, shot the three, and then just being late, obviously PJ fouled out, so it's next man up, and that's why our team is so dangerous because we're so talented and so deep that once PJ went out, I've got to step up, be more aggressive.

'Rese was already on fire, and then I just made shots late, and we got the win.

Q. What's your thought when Solo Ball hits that three-pointer? You guys had been up 12; seemed like you guys were in control of the game. When he hits that, what goes through your mind and what do you say in that huddle? How do you regroup after that?

TYRESE HUNTER: I can say because it was on me. I turned my head. That's something we always say when you're playing shooters, you can't turn your head away from him. But I just told him you've got to go win the game now.

It's a next-play mentality, so you've just got to keep it moving and try to win.

Q. Tyrese, what did it feel like to play in a game like this, high school gym, you've got teams waiting to play, Colorado-Michigan State waiting in the wings there, obviously a very intense environment. There was a scuffle in the overtime. As a player in the middle of that with such big emotional swings, can you describe what it felt like to be involved in that for 45 minutes?

TYRESE HUNTER: It's intense, but when it comes down to it, you've got to make sure your head is on straight, don't lose track of what's going on like with the emotion, the scramble that the guys have.

You've just got to make sure the guys are together so you can try to continue to win the game.

Q. For both of you guys, this is kind of a statement win. What is that statement?

TYRESE HUNTER: Just trying to identify who we are. I think we work so hard that we're getting an opportunity to showcase that. We don't care what anybody on the



outside is saying. We trust the group of guys that we've got, the coaching staff, the support staff, our players. Just establishing who we are. We've just got to keep working.

COLBY ROGERS: Yeah, to piggyback off what he said, I think internally we've always felt like we were capable to play with anybody, and we just tried to block out the outside know what I'm saying. Coach harps on that in practice all the time. We are going to have to take it. No body is going to give anything to us, so we came in with that mentality and we executed it today.

The statement is just we kind of felt like that already. It's just a matter of just showing it to the world.

Q. Did you guys discuss the situation coming in here with what happened on August 8, 2023, the fire here and then the tournament not being here last year? Did you discuss that, and before coming here as a team? And if so, how cool was it to give the area a game like that today?

COLBY ROGERS: Yeah, it was unfortunate what happened with the fire and everything last year so we weren't able to have the tournament last year, but I think for us, we're just extremely grateful to be here this year, to be invited here and to play UConn the first game. We looked at it like this is an opportunity of a lifetime. This is why guys play basketball, why we be in the gym, why we wake up early, late hours, to have games like this and showcase our talent. We're extremely grateful for this opportunity.

Q. PJ goes and makes all six of his free throws in the last 40 seconds of the game. What does that say about his composure?

TYRESE HUNTER: Yeah, we trust PJ. I know as soon as they got the tech, we sent PJ right to the line. We know what he's capable of. We're confident in him to shoot them. So yeah.

Q. Tyrese, obviously with your knee issue going on, you haven't practiced much at all, according to penny, in the past two weeks. What does it take to be out of that rhythm, not practice, and then do what you did today on this stage, and how is that knee doing?

TYRESE HUNTER: Just working with the training staff. I get drills and stuff, get out there, break a sweat, get shots up and stuff, so it's not like I'm totally sitting on the side, leg kicked up or something like that, but I'm still getting work in, making sure I'm staying in rhythm.

Q. Biggest win of your career?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, with the magnitude of what's going on here at The Invitational, I can say yes. That was back to back national champions undefeated, first round of the Maui tournament.

When we first got picked to play them, I was like, okay, starting off with a bang. I just got our team prepared. I used it as motivation.

Q. You had some big ones; you beat Houston when they were No. 1, Tennessee at Tennessee a few years ago. How does it feel?

PENNY HARDAWAY: I'm actually not taking any of this for granted because I know how hard it is to win and especially beat a team like that, but I'm so excited for our university and the city more so than anything because we need more positivity. We need more of -- this city, the entire city is happy right now, and that makes me happy, so that's the magnitude it had on this win.

Q. Yesterday you talked about you knew your team was going to come in and play hard. You were very disruptive with UConn and they couldn't get into their offense. What were you doing to make it very difficult for them offensively to get into their stuff?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, they're a well-oiled machine just watching them, man. They're just like clockwork because the times we did allow them to get into their stuff, they made those shots. They're really efficient and they're really sharp.

What we had to do was take the ball out of the point guard's hands, not let them get that rhythm as much as we could, and then they're so smart, we knew they were going to adjust again, and they did. Then they got a rhythm where they got in there and got comfortable and then we switched up defenses like three or four more times to try to get them uncomfortable again, and it worked.

You can't give them a steady diet because they're just too smart.

Q. What was your vantage point? What did you see on that scuffle with about 40 seconds left? Again, we asked the players, but what does that say about the composure and the way they handled the end of overtime there?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, it happens all the time. Dain reacted to Moussa being pushed down if that's what you were talking about. I was a little upset with Dain because we had a technical right there because Moussa got pushed

down by Johnson because he fouled out.

But I'm never going to be a guy that doesn't allow a teammate to take up for his teammates. So double foul, their ball, let's go get a stop and let's get back in it.

But I just saw that the team unified more at that moment versus being apart because he could have stayed where he was, not cared, but he cared enough to come to Moussa's defense, and I liked that, as well.

Q. Knowing that all that Lahaina has been through, to be able to come out on the first game back here after the fire and deliver a game like that, first of all, did you have a message for your team before coming here along any of the lines of what's gone on here? And then to be able to deliver that game today for the fans just all around, how cool was that?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, we were actually Lahaina Strong today, to be very honest. That just bleeds right into what we talked about before we came over here. Went through the horrible wildfires and it was devastating, but they grew together. They bonded.

I said, we need to use that type of strength for ourselves going into this fabulous tournament, and to be able to give them this game today, the very first game at 9:30, it's amazing to jump start this thing off. So thankful, so blessed to be here to get the invitation to come, and I love everything about Maui, man. I'm glad that it's recovering now.

Q. One of the things that UConn was able to do was kind of extend the pressure on you, start to trap a little bit. As you start to turn the page and get ready, what kind of adjustments do you want to make as teams start to extend pressure on you, try to trap a little bit? What do you want to see your team do?

PENNY HARDAWAY: I just want our guards to be able to handle the fundamentals of the game when it comes to that. You can't get into a trap space. You've got to get out of trap spaces, got to use your ball fakes to shift the defense and then get through it and advance the ball up the floor.

We do that, but in the heat of the battle against the No. 2 team in the country, the nervous energy hits, so we learned from that, so the best experience is going through it. That's the best teacher is the experience.

For us, the next time somebody does that, we'll be more prepared and ready in real time. Because it's easy to do 5 on 0.

Q. I know you always point to the city and the university and the players, but for yourself is there a sense a little bit of vindication after some of the criticism you faced last season and this off-season to now get this type of statement and victory for the program?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Not really, man. I just know that everybody has their opinion about what's going on, and some of it was warranted. I can't run away from what's going on. I know that it's a job that needs to -- we want to win in this city. We want to win. I'm no different from anyone else.

So when I get that criticism, sometimes when it gets personal, it hurts because I'm trying to fight for this city and the team, but I understand everyone has a job to do, and they have their opinion.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.