

Maui Invitational presented by Novavax

Monday, November 25, 2024

Lahaina, Hawaii, USA

Lahaina Civic Center

Auburn Tigers

Coach Bruce Pearl

Chad Baker-Mazara

Johni Broome

Postgame Press Conference



Coach wanted a simple high ball screen with me and Denver. Denver drove, and we teach it every day in practice, worst thing to do is get them the room. Me and Denver is down there, we're two animals, and he got on a run, and I let God do the rest.

CHAD BAKER-MAZARA: Coach really emphasized, especially on the big guys, whenever a shot goes up to go be there for the second challenge plunge, and he's been on Johni a little bit more about it, so I feel like today he was just being a beast down in the paint and he was in the right position at the right time and just got to be able to get the tip-in.

Q. Chad, you go down with injury, you looked like you were really fighting through it there, especially in the second half. What happened when you got hurt, and what made you be able to gut it out like you did after halftime?

CHAD BAKER-MAZARA: I just bumped knees with one of the guys and probably hit like a bad spot. I always say my mama raised a warrior. If I'm not dead, I'm going out there on the court.

Just basically had to soak it in and just come out there and put up a fight for the boys because I know they had my back and the coaching staff, so I've got to do the same for them.

Q. Johni, on that last play, the tip, did you cramp up when you landed, when you were on your back?

JOHNI BROOME: Yeah, I cramped up in my right leg. We're in a different environment a little bit. I played probably a couple extra minutes tonight, but I kind of trained myself to be conditioned and play through conditions like that. But just kind of cramped up, that's all.

BRUCE PEARL: You played the whole game!

Q. Coach talked about you all kind of rallying at halftime. There are moments in seasons that can really spur you forward. Feels like there was a special moment there. What did you say to each other at halftime when you're looking at that deficit?

Auburn 83, Iowa State 81

BRUCE PEARL: Well, one of the things that we talk about with Auburn basketball is to try to make history, and we're very proud of the history of Auburn basketball and some of the great players like Charles Barkley or Chuck Person or great coaches like Sonny Smith and Cliff Ellis.

This is our second top-5 win in the non-conference in the history of Auburn basketball. Not since 1990 when Kansas did it has a team started 5-0, including two top-5 wins. To this point, we've made history.

But we're not celebrating. That was a really good Iowa State team. To put 49 on us in the first half -- we didn't play very well, but they played great. The guys did a good job at halftime kind of getting after each other and not quitting. Not having Chad Baker for much of that first half was a factor. We're a lot better with him on the floor.

But I thought one thing I'm very proud of for these guys is they trust each other. They each took turns stepping up, and that there is as good a win as we're going to see and as good a game. Proud of my team and our coaching staff.

Q. Lay out for us what you saw that led to the win.

JOHNI BROOME: I mean, first off, they called a time-out with 22 seconds left, and our first objective was to get a stop. We pride ourselves on defense, and as you could see, the second half we took a lot of pride in that. In order for us to get that last possession we've got to get a stop to win the game. We ended up getting a stop.

CHAD BAKER-MAZARA: I mean, we was really kind of encouraging each other, just basically that we've been playing right, and knowing that they probably had the best half that they could ever have against us. Basically we were just talking to each other saying we're either going to come back out there and let them do the same thing or we're going to put a stop to it.

I feel like especially Johni was delivering the message. He came out there and said the right things and got everybody fired up, so we came out there and did what we had to do.

Q. Johni, you guys on defense, they went almost five minutes without hitting a shot there at the end. What was the key for you to slow them down and get the stops like y'all were able to?

JOHNI BROOME: Credit to them. First half they probably went five minutes scoring every bucket. They had 49 points in the first half. But ultimately we pride ourselves on our defense, and at halftime the message was just like, we've got to get stops in order to win. We set a number, and in order for us to get that number, we had to get a lot of stops in a row.

At the media time-out they said get five stops in a row. So I get three stops in a row, and then we just keep on piling on top of it and eventually they go on a scoring drive and we're able to get back in this game.

Q. To start off the second half you went on a 15-2 run. Besides the mindset change that you just discussed, was there any game plan shift that you had going into the second half?

JOHNI BROOME: Just be unselfish, trust each other, get stops, run in transition, and set our defense on the defensive side.

Q. Johni, I want to ask you about Chad. Just him playing through it and watching him gut it out like he did, what does that say about him and what he brings to this team?

JOHNI BROOME: I was kind of -- I was never really worried about him. I know he's a fighter. At halftime I talked to him, and he said he was going back out there, and throughout the second half, he said, I got you.

I knew he was coming to play, he was coming to bring it, and as you see, he's special. He came back in, hit a lot of big shots after not playing for a while, and that's the type of person he is. He's got our back because he knows we've got his.

Q. You guys were down 18 late in the first half, end up coming back and winning it. What was the key to the turnaround from your perspective?

BRUCE PEARL: Well, they obviously played brilliant basketball in the first half with unbelievable energy and effort. They outworked us. But we only turned the ball over twice in the second half. They turned people over one in four possessions, so they just weren't able to play with the same energy. We were able to run our offense and get that ball inside and mix up our inside out.

Look it helped having -- Chad Baker was plus 13 in the game. We don't have him in the first half because of banging knees.

So I just think the offense was in front of our bench. I thought in the first half we looked a little young, a little inexperienced. I thought we panicked offensively.

But I give Iowa State all the credit for the way they played. That's what a top-10 team does. That's how you're supposed to play.

But obviously give our kids credit for hanging in there and having the character to be able to withstand that run and not panic. And obviously starting off 15-2 changed the complexion of the game completely.

They got 58 percent in the first half and 32 percent in the second half. Our second half defense, our taking care of the basketball, maybe a little deeper.

Q. In a game with so many momentum shifts, can you speak to the effect of the Auburn family, the fans that showed up had on this game and how this sets you up momentum-wise going into the rest of the tournament?

BRUCE PEARL: Well, we talk about just one game at a time. It had been really hard to have lost that game as well as both teams played and as hard a.

So both teams played and have to play tomorrow at 3:00. That would have been a really hard turnaround. 6:00 is going to be tough enough as it is after so much of an emotion.

But we really talked about the opportunity to play three great teams three nights in a row and not really much about the invitational championship. We recognize the SEC has only won this thing twice in 40 years. Certainly now that we have advanced we're going to try to make history.

But we just have a whole new scout against Dayton and



North Carolina, a completely different team, but it was a good Iowa State team we beat tonight.

Q. You've gone with the double big starting lineup, Dylan had some huge plays, great plus minus. What was your thought process behind sticking with it and then going back to it as much as you all did?

BRUCE PEARL: I can't take credit for it. Chaney Johnson was in huge foul trouble, right, and that's one blessing, is that Chaney only played like 10 minutes because he got in enormous foul trouble, and he was playing well.

So it was easy to go with Dylan, easy to go with the double bigs, and they got two monsters in there, too. I just thought Dylan being in there at the end of the game, it just makes us better defensively. He's one of the best defensive centers in college basketball.

I thought Denver -- I was confident getting him the ball screen and getting him downhill. I thought that ball went in. It had to go in and out. I thought it was in. Then it comes out at the end and Johni is there to tip it back in. Really proud of these kids.

I thought Chris Moore came in in the second half -- again, we were in some pretty good foul trouble, and Chris came in in the second half and really picked us up defensively. Doesn't score a bucket but has two assists, no turnovers, did a great job for us defensively.

A lot of different guys were able to contribute out there. Tahaad had his moments, and we needed his speed and his quickness. I think the only thing that hopefully happens in that locker room is the guys gain confidence from the fact that there are enough pieces out there that it doesn't have to be just Johni, that several guys step up and make big plays, big shots.

Q. Johni played almost the whole game; Chad comes back from an injury. Talk about their toughness and how much they basically played that whole second half and helped you all come back.

BRUCE PEARL: I think these guys have embraced the fact that they love Auburn, truly love Auburn, and they're truly grateful for the support Auburn gets.

If you take a look at those guys that are out there, Johni Broome was not recruited at a high major level and he's got a chance to be one of the best players in college basketball. He was a three-star. That kind of wears on you. He wears that.

Chad Baker was in junior college.

Denver Jones had to be in junior college and work his way up to Florida International.

We may be a Power Five or Power Four, whatever, but we've got a lot of hardworking kids with some chips on their shoulders, and hopefully just taking advantage of the opportunity.

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