

Maui Invitational presented by Novavax

Tuesday, November 26, 2024

Lahaina, Hawaii, USA

Lahaina Civic Center

Memphis Tigers Penny Hardaway PJ Haggerty Tyrese Hunter

Postgame Press Conference

Memphis 71, Michigan State 63

PENNY HARDAWAY: I saw grit, I saw toughness, I saw execution, I saw winners, just saw guys that really wanted this tournament. Wanted the game I should say. We know we want to win the tournament, but saw guys that just really got together, total team effort and pulled together to get a win against a very tough team.

Q. Tyrese, so many big shots you've made in these last two days. Has there been any one bigger than the and-one on the three-point shot where you were fouled? They had just gone on like a quick 4-0 thing to cut your lead from 11 to 7 and the momentum is swinging and you hit that shot and then hit the free throw. Has there been a bigger shot in the last two days than that one for you?

TYRESE HUNTER: I don't know, maybe the shot my freshman year to send us to the Sweet 16 maybe. But I'm just really playing in the moment for us.

Q. Wanted to follow up on that. You've had seven career games with four or more threes and three of them have come in your first six games with Memphis this season. What has allowed you to have this three-point success in the last games?

TYRESE HUNTER: Just my confidence, putting in the work. I know when I came to this program, just talking with Penny, it's like, you're shooting good, but you got to get more of them up and just trusting in that, trusting in my work ethic and just letting it play out through the summer, practice, into the games.



Q. Penny or the players, Penny, you talked about you were worried about the wear and tear on your team, especially with three games in three days. Today it looked like y'all had every bit of gas in the tank still left even after yesterday's UConn win. What did it take to have that win and turn back around and play the way you played today?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, we're just blessed, man, to have a great group of young men. God blessed us with this opportunity to have this great team. These young men, they need all the credit because we push them really hard. Even though they don't like it all the time, they respond.

Right now you're seeing the response, like a reset. They put in so much work. These guys live in the gym. When it's time to compete, they get up to compete. Like yesterday was a game that could have drawn all the energy out because it was a really tough game. Come back today, to have that level of intensity again offensively and defensively just says a lot about them, and I just thank God to have these guys on my team.

Q. For the players, with such a quick turnaround what was Penny's couple points of emphasis to make sure you guys had a good game against Michigan State?

PJ HAGGERTY: Really just staying locked in, just the whole first and second half, just being us really, the Memphis way, and just out-toughing them. That's really been the motto.

Q. PJ, more directed to you, you had like nine rebounds. There's something about your shooting everybody pays attention to, but that part of your game, what's drawing you to be able to be that kind of all-around player in addition to your ability to score?

PJ HAGGERTY: Yeah, you know, I just try to do whatever we need to win the games. I try to find the spots to rebound. Coach said today was going to be a big rebounding day for the guards, so I was able to get in there, our big men boxed out well, so I was able to get in there and get some big-time rebounds.

Q. PJ or Tyrese, when Dain and Moussa both foul out



with such a significant chunk of time left, does that change your mentalities at all?

TYRESE HUNTER: You for sure got to get down there and get physical. I think that's obvious that our main two centers are in the game and you've got to step up, but going to be prepared for it.

I think our whole mentality coming into the game was being physical, hitting, boxing out, and I think they got probably one addition late in the game, so just trying to adjust quick.

Q. Memphis has been here six times, I think, something like that, and they've never made the championship game. What sort of attitude are you guys taking into tomorrow? I know you don't know who you're playing yet, but what's your mindset going into tomorrow?

TYRESE HUNTER: Just stay locked in like the last two games. Trusting the coaching staff, the game, the scout, that they're going to give us. Of course take care of our bodies physically, mentally, stay well put together, and honestly just go out and be us.

I think we're confident enough to just play our game and go out there and try to win.

Q. Just wanted to follow up asking about Tyrese. He's obviously having his best three-point shooting he ever has, 12 in the last two games. What attracted you to him out of the transfer portal, and can you speak to the work he's put in and being able to build these performances on such a big stage?

PENNY HARDAWAY: What attracted me to Tyrese was his freshman year at Iowa State played us in Brooklyn and he demolished us. He just really had an unbelievable game as a freshman and I was a fan from that point on.

When he got in the portal, he was a guy that I targeted. I was like, we need him. I saw him play at Texas the last couple years. He's been through so many coaches, so many different -- like going to Iowa State to play for one coach and then playing for TJ, going to Texas to play for Coach Beard, and ended up playing for Coach Terry.

It was like, I just want to get back to who I am and my roots, and I told him if you come here we're going to put the ball in your hands, we're going to allow you to be able to play. We knew he and PJ would be a great backcourt so I had to sell him on that, but his work that he's putting in every day, we work on every shot that he shoots, we work on that throughout the week, and he's in the gym every day with a manager, with PJ or with Coby Rogers. His hard

work is paying off, but I've been a fan of his since his freshman year.

Q. In the first half Michigan State which is a team that's not known for three-point shooting was hitting shots, and that allowed them to stay with y'all, but in the second half you took that away. What were the adjustments made at halftime?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, we knew at some point they were going to get hot because they're not going to shoot the ball that poorly. They were like 352nd in the nation at 20 percent from three as a team. We knew that wasn't going to continue. They're competitors. Coach Izzo, I love Coach Izzo for a lot of reasons. First of all, his heart, his tenacity, his championship status, Hall of Fame, all of that. We knew that they were going to eventually make some shots.

In the second half we started staying at home more. We started wanting them to throw the ball inside because we just tried to take the paint away early and make them shoot threes and just so happened they didn't make the ones they needed to make and then we had to adjust at halftime with trying to make the ball find the post and not giving them those threes.

Q. It was '92 when you were here and came in third. Is there any part of you at all that's thinking about that going into tomorrow, just how full circle this kind of feels? Penny the coach has a chance to do what Penny the player never did?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, it is really weird because we went to overtime against BYU, and Tim Duncan was a teammate of mine, and I think it was that year -- no, it was the following year, I'm sorry. I got my ball stolen at half court at an inopportune time, and I still remember that play.

To lose that game, because I really wanted to play against Duke, wanted to play against Bobby and those guys and just to not get an opportunity, to be here now full circle, to be in the championship game as a coach, man, that's just God.

I just look at it in that fashion because it doesn't happen this well for a lot of people. So I'm just thankful for the opportunity for tomorrow.

Q. Should you play North Carolina in the championship game, what does playing the exhibition game, what did you learn from that, and how can that help you?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Without R.J. playing, we do know

who they are now and what they're trying to do because Coach Hubert does a great job. They didn't have RJ, and that makes a huge difference because he just takes over a game. So for us, it's kind of like you really don't know because we didn't play them full strength, and Moussa didn't play for us, and you really can't tell.

But we do know their roster enough to know personnel better, especially the freshmen, and know how to approach tomorrow if they are to win the game.

Q. Your team is very confident. When PJ went out yesterday and your two bigs yesterday, they didn't flinch, just next man up. Where does that confidence come from?

PENNY HARDAWAY: It's just a testament to the work that we put in. We have to push harder than any team in the country because we don't really get the respect. We have to earn everything that we get. So we put so much pressure on our guys, and it's almost unfair the amount of pressure because we have to win early to get the respect. We can't lose a game and then say they'll be better by January or February, because we haven't arrived yet.

We have to put so much pressure on those young men, and they have the confidence. That crew is so tight that they're unified when they come to the gym, and they're ready to play when they touch the gym, and it doesn't matter who it's against.

Q. What does it do to a psyche of a team and of young men when you go from kind of underrated, nobody is looking at y'all, to you get that UConn win and all of a sudden there's national commentators saying this might be a top 15, top 10 team? What's that been like the last 12, 24 hours, whatever it is?

PENNY HARDAWAY: It feels good because as a competitor, as a former basketball player, to play, now coach, you want to be a part of the rare air in the NCAA. You want to be a part of that group that they mention with the Dukes and the Kansases. You want Memphis' name to be there.

So you've got to fight, and you've got to grind, and that's why I have one of the top non-conference schedules every year, because we want to play the guys to kind of show who we are. That's all a part of it for us, man. It's a journey. It's always constantly trying to fight to get our respect, and little by little, hopefully we're getting there. We want that attention because we work so hard, we want it. We want to be a part of that.

Q. Did you expect to be where you are now by this

point in the calendar?

PENNY HARDAWAY: I can't say that with a new team, with 13 new players. I can't say I would have thought we'd be right here, right now, 6-0 in a championship game in Maui with the schedule that we've already played. Those two exhibitions against Carolina and Alabama did help us a lot, though.

Q. So you've surprised even yourself?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Again, I said God can do everything but fail, so I'm not ever to the point where I don't think it could happen, but it wouldn't have been 6-0 in the championship game thinking right away with a new team. You'll take this any day, though.

Q. PJ Carter, again, it wasn't the difference in the game, but he hit two late free throws again after what he did yesterday. Having a guy like that who can come in in the clutch like that --

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, PJ is like a true professional. In this day and age you don't get a lot of young men who are ready to go when their number is called because they're over on the sideline pouting. He's not pouting. He's ready, and when his number has been called, he's been ready to go in every game.

Definitely so happy for him because he puts a lot of work in, and just happy for him, as well.

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