

# Maui Invitational presented by Novavax

Tuesday, November 26, 2024

Lahaina, Hawaii, USA

Lahaina Civic Center

## Auburn Tigers

## Coach Bruce Pearl

### Postgame Press Conference

Auburn 85, UNC 72

BRUCE PEARL: Guys will be in shortly. We're trying to get them off their feet, back to the hotel.

Having six guys in double figures was really, really good. The guys shared the ball really well. North Carolina is a great, great offensive team. We know they've come back from 20-point deficits before.

Thought our guys stepped up their game. The start of the second half, for sure, but also start of the game extremely well.

That's all.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for coach.

**Q. Johni, yesterday he plays an Auburn-best 36 minutes. I know North Carolina doesn't have the biggest front line in the country. 23-19, high-leverage game. Speak to his continual growth.**

BRUCE PEARL: Well, I think you got to remember where Johni Broome came from. That doesn't get talked enough about. He's a three star out of Temple Catholic. He's not fast enough, he's not quick enough, he's not good enough. He doesn't make the top AAU teams in Florida. He's a Loma junior, mid-major kid.

All he's ever done his entire career is prove people wrong. Not an NBA player because he's not an NBA athlete. All he does is score and all he does is defend and all he does is win.

He's old school that has developed always an inside game and developed a perimeter game. He's an outstanding passer. He's an outstanding ball handler. He can you put the ball down the floor to make plays. I trust him with the



ball in his hands in the post.

Obviously just a dominant, dominant rebounder.

As far as just play calling for him, we got a guy we can throw the ball to and he can score down there. Forces double-teams, things like that.

It's like having a guy like R.J. Davis who can just go get a bucket whenever he wants to off of the perimeter.

I tell you what. Denver Jones, one of the best defensive guards in college basketball. He is one of the reasons why our team has won the games that we have won. Nobody talks about it, writes about it.

I don't know how many times he scored. I don't know how many times R.J. Davis scored on him, but not many. I think the other guards, Miles Kelly, this is the best he's played in a big game for us. I thought he really guarded well. Didn't turn the ball over. Shot it really well.

Chaney Johnson showed you what he's capable of. He's a miss matchup that forces position, a powerful player that has some perimeter skills. Our ability to guard is going to get challenged tomorrow because Memphis will drive in, they'll initiate contact, they'll fall on the floor.

The game is really hard to referee.

**Q. You mentioned Johni and Chaney and Chad, all the guys you've developed and improved. Johni specifically, is it something about him? About you guys? How has he reached these heights that we're seeing right now?**

BRUCE PEARL: I think a combination of things. He worked really hard in the off-season. He's in the best shape of his life. He's going to graduate mid-semester. He wanted to come back and get his degree.

Coach Dye talked about the great Pat Dye talked about having the student-athletes love Auburn because he loved Auburn. Our kids love Auburn. They love the support that we get from the fan base, the way our fans travel. He just goes out every night, tries to reward them.

He's still got a big chip on his shoulder, but he's worked really hard. Ira Bowman does a phenomenal job on the inside. He and Steven Pearl have a great relationship. Steven can get on him, make him accountable, he listens.

Mike, my offensive coordinator, does a great job getting him good touches where he is in position to finish.

**Q. You said last night with Chaney getting in foul trouble could be a blessing. He plays almost the entire second half. What kind of difference did he make being able to be as fresh as he was in this matchup?**

BRUCE PEARL: He's a nightmare to match up with. Chaney can do things on the perimeter. When you play North Carolina, you got to be able to switch one through four your fours have to be able to cover. So having Chris Moore and Chaney and Johni as my four men, they're all able to move their feet.

Dylan Cardwell had a tremendous number of vertical plays. They're just driving into him. He's allowed to maintain his position and defend his position and wall up. I don't care how much people drive into you, you're allowed your space. It's like dirty dancing. This is my space, this is your space. I thought we were awfully vertical tonight.

**Q. Something you've emphasized all season is being able to play without fouling. Your team struggled at times today. How has being able to win through that speak to your depth? How do you prepare for a physical Memphis defense tomorrow?**

BRUCE PEARL: Our perimeter defenders are always going to be challenged. Memphis is a tough cover. Three guards that are hard to stay in front of. They all make great one on one plays, make tough twos, threes; they all shoot a lot of free throws.

We're going to have to stay down, we're going to have to stay up, again, continue to try to guard where verticality. When they drive into contact, we hope we're able to maintain our position on the floor.

They've got three pretty good inside guys, really, really athletic. They played a very tough schedule, like us. In other words, North Carolina played them in the pre-season. Penny always plays a tough schedule. He's got a lot of guys that transferred from big-time places. Playing great, great basketball.

**Q. What do you like about some areas that you feel you may be able to exploit advantage-wise for you tomorrow?**

BRUCE PEARL: Honestly, I don't know yet. We've taken them one game at the same time truly. I have not watched Memphis. I watched them today a little bit against Michigan State.

Like what every team is going to do, we're going to do what we do, they're going to do what they do. Fatigue will be a factor. What time is it now? It's 9:00? What time did Memphis get done playing today? 12:40. We're trying to get our guys back off their feet as quickly as we possibly can.

**Q. You mentioned you came out of halftime, they went on a 15-2 run late in the first half. You responded, stomped on their necks coming out of halftime. What was the message at halftime?**

BRUCE PEARL: Look, coaches can help win games. Players win championships. They're holding each other accountable. They recognize that we got to close out and we got to compete. We can't take possessions off.

Again, I thought we shared it. We only turned the ball over eight times. They had a negative assist-turnover ratio. That doesn't happen at North Carolina very often. Defensive rebounding wins championships. That's what we like to try to focus on.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, coach.

BRUCE PEARL: Thank you, guys.

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