

Maui Invitational presented by Novavax

Wednesday, November 27, 2024

Lahaina, Hawaii, USA

Lahaina Civic Center

Memphis Tigers Coach Penny hardaway PJ Haggerty Colby Rogers

Postgame Press Conference

Auburn 90, Memphis 76

Q. Coach, two great games and then this one was a little bit tougher. Talk about your experience here in Maui overall.

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, for sure. We're not going to let this game define who we are. Obviously we played against a really good team, No. 4 team in the nation. We wanted to win it. We didn't take care of business today, but we learned a lot from this entire weekend and saw that we belong.

You let a team get out 9-0 on you that's the No. 4 team in the nation, you can't recover from that. Then our weaknesses showed up today. They exposed us on the glass, and that's something we talk about all the time as a group. I feel like we grew from this weekend, and it's something we're only going to get better.

This is a new team, 13 new players. To get to the championship, not knowing each other, not being in a battle before this weekend with the best teams in the country, I'm really proud of the effort and looking forward to getting back to practice after Thanksgiving and enjoying this Thanksgiving.

Q. PJ, you were one of the driving forces behind Memphis keeping things close in the first half. Can you just describe what it was like going up against and into the teeth of that Auburn defense with the size and physicality they have.

PJ HAGGERTY: Yeah, that was a pretty good defensive team. I think that wasn't really our problem. I think the



problem was just rebounding. But getting in the paint, I think we really didn't have a problem. We missed a couple of bunnies that we normally make, but that's just part of the game.

Q. For Colby or PJ, you said rebounding was probably the biggest issue today. What was it that was making it so tough for you guys to hang with them on the glass?

COLBY ROGERS: I mean, they're a big, physical team. When they crash, they crash really hard. You've got to give credit to bloom, called well, the other business. They kept the ball alive.

We just didn't match their physicality as we should have, and they kind of exposed us with that. So give them credit, but we've just got to be better rebounding. We need all five to rebound, especially against a team like that that kind of lives on the glass.

But it's a good learning experience. I think we'll grow from this.

Q. PJ, do you share -- Coach just said we're not going to let this game define us, we're only going to get better. Do you share that outlook? This was a tough road trip, four-game road trip, San Francisco and then three here. You guys finished 3-1. It probably stings today, but I would think that you would take 3-1 on a road trip like this.

PJ HAGGERTY: Yeah, for sure. We played some top-10 teams. None of those games were easy. We fought hard, came out the last one and lost. But at the end of the day it's just one loss. We'll be back in the gym over break and just work on things we've got to work on, and we'll be back for sure.

Q. Just tell me how much confidence do you guys leave Maui with?

COLBY ROGERS: I think we have a lot of confidence. Like Coach said, we're a new team. To make it to the championship against two top-5 teams, that's something to really hang your head up about. I don't think we should leave here hanging our heads down, feeling like --

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obviously we lost, there's no moral victories, but to go 3-1 on this road trip, I think this gives us a lot of momentum going into break.

We've just got to make sure we learn from this, grow from it, and just don't let this carry on for too long. It's just one game, and we have a long season ahead of us.

As long as we're playing our best basketball in March, that's what really matters. I think we've just got to keep the main thing the main thing and just enjoy this moment, go back home, regroup, and then just keep working.

Q. Coach, Hunter had a tough outing. What were they doing to negate the offense?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Well, obviously me being a basketball player that played at the highest level, I understood what they were going to do to PJ and Tyrese. They were going to make it hard. They were denying them the ball. Every time he drove, they were there to try to stop him. It was a total team effort, and I knew that was going to happen today because why wouldn't you when those were the two hottest guys in the tournament, PJ and Tyrese.

We have to do a better job when we get back of just learning from everything that happened this weekend -- I'm sorry, this week. And just keep getting better.

But I knew that they were going to do what they did today. I would have done the same thing.

Q. When you're going against a team like Auburn that lives inside, lives on the offensive glass and you know that your team is a little bit thinner in the front court, what do you go into a game like that -- how do you prepare for that? How do you scheme against that? What do you do?

PENNY HARDAWAY: We had all the answers to the test before the game. We knew exactly how they were going to play. We played them two years ago with Johni Broome and Caldwell, and the mentality has to be that you're going to go into a fist fight, a bare-knuckle fight.

We knew that going in, but there's nothing you can do when that ball goes in the air except for hit and box out, and we didn't, and that 9-0 run to start the game pushed us pretty much out of reach.

The way they were playing gave them the confidence, and they pushed them away, and then we weren't rebounding. We went zone four possessions and stopped them all four times, and they got the rebound three out of four, I think,

and they made two threes in that possession, in those possessions.

No game plan can prepare you for that. Practice does. Now they have to know to take the rebound. We talk about rebounding all the time because we know what it's going to come down to: Protecting the ball and rebounding. We just didn't do it today.

Q. Does what you saw today even maybe add a sense of urgency to add a player to get some more size on this team come December, or is that not the case?

PENNY HARDAWAY: You know, like I said, I've never shied away from saying that we wouldn't add someone if it was fitting. But Dain, Moussa and Nick, it has to start with those guys on the glass. They have to take everything personal, and then the guards have to rebound, as well, and I think we will after this tournament because experience is the best teacher. They showed us how to get it done.

Johni has been there three years; Caldwell has been there four years. Those guys have paid their dues and they've gone through their bumps and bruises. They came to win today, and we just couldn't overcome that.

Q. You mentioned you've obviously played Johni before, but how would you evaluate his performance today and the impact he had?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Oh, way more locked in. When he first transferred to Auburn he was probably a little distracted and thought it was going to be easier. I think he got a reality check of what it was like to come up, and then now he understands the lay of the land. He knows how serious he has to be, knows he has to be a leader, and he's doing that now. That's a total difference from two years ago to now with him.

Q. After experiencing the Lahaina Civic for these last three days, how similar or different was your experience here this week compared to when you played here?

PENNY HARDAWAY: It was the same. Lahaina has always been great to all the teams coming over. They show the appreciation from the first day. They come out and they support. That's the great thing. You can tell they want this tournament back here, like after the wildfires, and that it belongs here, and that it'll be here for a lot longer. We're happy to come every time because it's such a beautiful place with beautiful people.

Q. If there are people out there who are thinking this is



-- they're having flashbacks to last year in the Bahamas beating Michigan and Arkansas and then losing this way to Villanova, why is this different than that? Why is this not that at all?

PENNY HARDAWAY: I mean, you're getting into two championship games against two really good teams. Villanova was hungry, hungrier than us. It came down to one-on-one kind of basketball like we kind of did today. It was kind of similar.

As a coach you can only put the guys in position, and it came down to a rebounding game. They made a ton of threes on us in the Bahamas. They got really hot.

Here it came down to a reasoning game, and I'm going to always say that when you get in championship games, the ball can bounce any way, but you've got to be able to rebound and box out.

Until we get that mentality, which we didn't have that last year, we get that mentality, then we'll be champions instead of finishing runner-up.

But this game was totally different from that Bahamas because they just got hot from three. I think they made like 12 threes in the first half. This was just straight, grind it out fight that we lost.

Q. Obviously this is the first time this season where your team has faced real adversity on the court. What did you see in the toughest moments of this game from your team in their response to this compared to last year?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, it wasn't a good response. It was basically -- you've got to think these young men have nerves. They haven't been here as a group. It's a new team. It's the beginning of the season. It's like Jason said, it's early, and if we would have said we would have been 3-1 in that stretch instead of 1-3 or 0-4 or something like that, then we would be very disappointed.

But to be 3-1 on this stretch, there's nothing to be ashamed of. But what I saw was a nervous team that didn't make the challenge to hit and box out. If you hit and box out this game, the game is totally different. You've got to be able to do that against teams like this.

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