

Maui Invitational presented by Novavax

Wednesday, November 27, 2024

Lahaina, Hawaii, USA

Lahaina Civic Center

Auburn Tigers

Coach Bruce Pearl

Johni Broome

Dylan Cardwell

Postgame Press Conference



Auburn 90, Memphis 76

Q. What are your thoughts after today's game?

BRUCE PEARL: Well, sitting beside me is 39 points, 19 rebounds, 12 assists and only two turnovers. I'd say we got pretty dominant play from our bigs.

You know, it's kind of an interesting story. Dylan has had the challenge of playing behind the last couple years Walker Kessler and Johni Broome. You just wouldn't believe how eloquently he did that.

When Johni decided to come back, we knew we could have a chance to have a really good team, and one of the things that Dylan and I talked about his coming back was not playing behind Johni but playing with him.

We worked on it all summer, all fall, and it wasn't great this summer or fall, right?

DYLAN CARDWELL: No.

BRUCE PEARL: And they wanted to play together so badly. So I kept on in practice going, look, this is fine, we've got time, but here's the plus/minus. We have to play faster. We have to play quicker.

Anyways, I'm just happy for these guys because these guys are loving playing together. They were never on the floor together very much in the last couple years, so it's just incredible. They've got great chemistry. They trust each other. They listen to each other. As well, I believe, we've got the best front line in college basketball.

Q. Johni, tournament MVP, congratulations. What are your thoughts after three games here in Maui?

JOHNI BROOME: First off, all glory to God. I thank my teammates, thanks to my coaches. Without them, I wouldn't have had this trophy. The Auburn family traveling, I don't think we would have won the tournament without them. It felt like home. I'm proud of my teammates and my Auburn family.

Q. Dylan, what got into you on offense? What was working so well that you were able to get at the rim whenever you wanted to?

DYLAN CARDWELL: First things first, all glory to my God, Jesus Christ, my Lord and savior.

I want to give a big shout out to my boy Johni. Before the game started when we were in film this morning, he said, they're going to double-team big, big cross or whatever, and he just told me to go to the rim, go to the backside and you're going to be open every time, and he just said trust me with the lob, and I trusted him.

It was great playing with Johni. It's a blessing to have him on my team, and it's a blessing to have him as my brother.

Q. Johni, you averaged 21.6 points per game in this tournament. You were four assists away from a triple-double. You're on the top of everyone's Player of the Year watch list so far. You've helped cement Auburn to become a top-5 program this year. What have you learned about yourself and how you've evolved as a player from your beginnings at Morehead State as a three-star recruit?

JOHNI BROOME: Well, first of all, I came to Auburn because I saw what Coach Pearl was doing with the program. I saw Jabari, Walker, Chuma, JT, Issac. I saw what he had done with those guys and I wanted to come to a foundation that was already felt. That's why I came to Auburn.

Coach trusted me and I trusted him. I mean, the Player of the Year don't really matter to me. I care about winning. As long as we keep winning, that set of eyes are on you, so I just look forward to winning and keep helping my team

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

win in any way I can.

Q. Dylan says you're telling him to be ready on the backside for some of the lobs, but what was your head space going into today, what you needed to do, and how early on you made a three in the first possession of the game? How early on did you feel that you had it going?

JOHNI BROOME: The first game Iowa State doubled, and we knew that going into the game. Second game, North Carolina didn't double, and we won that game. Then this last game, they said they might play one-on-one, they might double.

So just watching a little bit of film on them and just doing research. But just trusting my teammates. If teams want to double-team me, I don't mind passing it. I trust them. I told him be ready for the rim, and he was ready. But my guards was also ready. They trusted me to get me on the side. I was able to get the ball back out to them.

I mean, I don't know.

Q. Dylan, defensively you guys were able to really shut them down, take away the stuff that they like to do, especially the three-point shot. I know you had to go out on the perimeter, switch a lot. What was the key for y'all to be able to limit Memphis from doing what they like to do on offense?

DYLAN CARDWELL: Well, in our scouting report we knew they had three really good shooting guards. They're the best three-point shooting team in the country percentage-wise, and we just didn't want them to get too hot, and we had to make sure that we stayed on our shooters.

11, Hunter, is a great shooter; pretty much makes 50 percent of his shots. Just why let him get an open three; just run him off the line. We were very locked into our scouting report.

It was a short turnaround from yesterday. Coach Pearl said -- before the first game, before yesterday's game we had 18 hours to play two games. So for this team to buy in and lock in in this 18-hour window is just something special to see.

Q. Dylan, a few years ago you were on the roster of that team that was a 2 seed last season, obviously a very, very good team, as well. I know we're not even a month in, but as you take stock and step back from this championship and think about the guys that are in that locker room with you, what feels different about

this team and gives you even more belief that maybe this could be the best group you've ever been a part of?

DYLAN CARDWELL: We're just a tough scout. I'll leave it at that. Coach Pearl brought in some guys that when you're scouting guys, you don't know who to stop. I'm sure I wasn't on anybody's scouting report offensively and then I just go off for 18. You don't know who it's going to be.

Coach Pearl always says it's going to be a different guy every night, and you saw in this tournament. It could be Chad, it could be Chaney, can be Denver, can be Tahaad. It could be anybody.

All of our games it's someone different. It's just amazing to see. That's the difference I've seen in this year's team in comparison to years past. We're just a bunch of dogs.

Q. Real quick, wondering if you guys watched this tournament growing up, and if so, how does it feel to win it now and walk away with that trophy?

JOHNI BROOME: I know for me, I've definitely watched this tournament most of the time growing up. Probably the biggest tournament in basketball besides March Madness. But when Auburn was in it and they played UConn and those guys, I was at Morehead still but I was watching that tournament, as well. I've always watched it.

Q. And to win it?

JOHNI BROOME: To win it, it feels amazing. I always talk about my teammates and my coaches, but the Auburn family is really a family. It feels better to win it with the guys in the locker room since we've been grinding this whole year and everybody with a smile on their face, holding trophies up, being able to celebrate, it's great. It feels good to me.

DYLAN CARDWELL: For me, just look at the field we had to go against and to come out on top, you have a lot of respected programs, UConn, UNC, Michigan State, Memphis, all great teams, Dayton and Colorado. If I'm missing somebody I apologize --

JOHNI BROOME: Iowa State.

DYLAN CARDWELL: Iowa State, good grief. It's a tough field. We knew that coming in. Just to go out on top, it means a lot to me and gives this team confidence in each other and the scouts that we have.

Q. Dylan, Coach Pearl was talking about obviously the relationship that you and Johni have had to have.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Obviously this pairing is working really well, but the last couple of years, what about your relationship made you comfortable being in that role and how did you handle that as eloquently as you did?

DYLAN CARDWELL: Yeah, a year ago pretty much this week Johni and I became friends. The first year he was here, I looked at him as an opponent rather than my teammate, and that kind of showed on the court. I wasn't cheering for him. I wasn't really happy for him as I should have been.

Last year, the Lord really challenged me in that Virginia Tech game. I prayed for Johni in warm-ups, and he dropped 30. But with him dropping 30, I only played nine minutes. The Lord gave me an option. He's like, you can either be happy that my prayer was answered or I could be stingy that my teammate went off for 30.

After that Virginia Tech game we went on to play in New York, and Johni got subbed out and then I went 6 for 6 from the free-throw line, and the loudest person in that arena was Johni Broome.

After that, he earned my respect, and I looked at him -- not really earned my respect but became a brother to me because I realized that he was not my opposition but he was a brother and he was a teammate, and that's something that Coach Pearl has been telling us since we got here, I'm going to bring in guys that you're going to love on that are going to be there for you for the rest of your life.

The guys in the locker room are not the opponent, and that's what you see today. We have so many guys that are happy for one another rather than looking at them as competition, and I feel like once I let my pride go and I let that go, Johni and I's relationship really took off.

Q. It felt like the last two games especially you guys were winning the 50/50 balls, the hustle, winning on the glass. How crucial is that level of effort and keeping that up for all 40 minutes to what y'all do?

JOHNI BROOME: Well, let's make one thing clear. Every film session, the first clip, BP says, we can't get beat 50/50 balls. That's how he starts the film session every time. That's probably the one thing that you will get subbed out for that he don't play with is being out-hustled, being not the most exciting team to play.

So getting to 50/50 balls and rebounding and things like that, that's effort. That's things you can control. I feel like everybody in our locker room takes that accountability on doing that in order to win the ballgames and help us.

BRUCE PEARL: Anybody that says student-athletes have changed, anybody that says this is not all about the student-athletes, anybody want to complain about this or that, this is old-school pride, old-school love of their teammates, love their coaches, love their university.

Just grateful, giving God the glory, so on, so forth. Kids haven't changed. Kids want to be coached. They want to be held accountable. They want to be believed in, and they want to be held to a high standard.

That's just not changed. A lot of things around our game have changed, but this should give you guys and everybody watching hope because it's all about these kids and teaching them, and I'm just very proud of these young men.

Q. Bruce, you talked about it before the game how good Memphis is at shooting threes. They were stuck on two attempts for most of the game. What was the key for y'all to running them off the line and keeping them from getting hot like that?

BRUCE PEARL: Memphis is better from the three and free than they are from two. And so the whole scouting report was that's the only way you can beat us is to beat us from three. So we pressed up. We switched out.

We didn't mind bad matchups, but we just had to make sure we didn't leave perimeter. We just didn't allow any advantage/disadvantage, or not a whole lot.

As a result, Haggerty played well and was able to make some tough twos. But that was what the defensive game plan -- again, Corey Williams and Chad Pruitt, that team at Iowa State, Iowa State's guys are really, really good. They're really, really good.

Then Mike Burgomaster and Ira Bowman and his scout team had North Carolina. What an honor to go up against the Tar Heels.

And then Steven Pearl, my son, had this one tonight. Steven is sort of my defensive coordinator, and he kind of helps guide us there. Mike Burgomaster is my offensive coordinator, and he and I put the offensive game plans together.

I thought our coaches just did a tremendous job, and like Dylan talked about, short prep. Like we had 18 hours to get ready for Memphis, but that scouting report was on my desk when I got back to that hotel and we were able to get the guys ready real quick.

Q. Bruce, you've spoken about Mike over the past

couple of days and obviously over the past couple of years as he's grown to become a more important part of your staff. What was it in today's game that he saw that you guys could take advantage of, and how has he been able to make the most of all those different parts that Dylan was talking about that you have?

BRUCE PEARL: Mike Burgomaster is a great story. Like a lot of guys on our team, come from pretty humble beginnings. He was a manager at Miami and wanted a GA job. Usually GA jobs go to former players. But I met Mike on a recommendation from one of my former assistants Harris Adler and the guys down at Miami, and I was impressed with his mind and brought him up as a GA. And I'm not letting him go.

He was able to take my system, our system, Dr. Tom Davis' system, and together we've been able to blend it with some of the harder actions to guard in basketball, whether it's European basketball or whoever is doing what.

In some way, I'd like to think that we've been doing some things for a few years that we are now seeing other people doing. It's about working as a team.

So Mike is -- what happens is we develop these offensive systems and then Mike, like an offensive coordinator, is my play caller. Like just like a football coach who would have the headset on, and Mike is, okay, what's next, what's next.

Nine times out of ten, I'll go with what he's got.

Q. Bruce, you guys only have one week to rest to prepare for another tough match and face Duke at Cameron. What did you learn most about your team this week, and how will you use that to carry forward?

BRUCE PEARL: Well, obviously Maui is a prize. We're so happy for the people here in Lahaina that the Maui Invitational and this field with this incredible group of coaches and programs were able to come back to the island.

You know, I saw my picture up there on the wall, and it was like Bill Self and Mike Krzyzewski and Tom Izzo and -- I'm like, what am I doing up here? Come on. I think Pearl must have paid somebody to put his picture up there.

But now my team and our coaching staff put us up there. The other one that matters to me that's up there, 1987, Dr. Tom Davis brought his Iowa team here. I was an assistant and we won the fourth Maui Invitational. We came here a couple years ago with Auburn and we won two games and lost to Duke by four. That team got to the Final Four.

This has been a great springboard, but the confidence that we're going to get from this is we know we can play with anybody. Where do we go from here. I promise you this, we will stay humble and hungry. We will not begin to think much of ourselves.

If we stay healthy, we continue to get God's blessing, we'll be in position.

Q. I saw you when JP came out in the first half, saw you getting the crowd to applaud him. He had an extended run today in both halves and played well --

BRUCE PEARL: Yeah, JP had his best game for us. His confidence has been a struggle a little bit. He was much better defensively today, locked in, more aggressive, and we need him.

Like these guys talked about, it's the sum of our parts. So he's got to fight, fight, fight to be able to keep his own confidence, his aggressiveness.

So having him play so well -- Chad Baker-Mazara will not get a lot of talk about, but he was one of our most consistent performers. I mean, makes tough shots, shoots a great percentage. If I did more to get him more touches and put the ball in his hands more, people would be talking about Chad Baker-Mazara nationally for how good a player he is.

I hope NBA scouts saw how good a player he is, and again, how unselfish he is and how productive he is. He almost always wins the plus-minus. We're just always better with him on the floor because we've got to do it at both ends.

We talked about Denver Jones being one of the best defensive guards in the country, and now playing both 1 and 2.

Tonight, Miles Kelly did not play very much because he had a little bit of an issue with his wrist, and quite frankly could not even shoot the ball, but he wanted to be out there for the first run, first possession of both halves because he wanted to see us get off to a good start defensively, and even if he couldn't shoot the ball, which he probably could not, we put him out there. What a teammate.

Q. Coach, this tournament is part of what is probably some of the most ambitious non-conference scheduling that we've seen from you or any other program in recent history. What can you say about your mindset over the off-season scheduling this -- putting the schedule together and how it's paying

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

BRUCE PEARL: Well, we knew we had a good team coming back. I just want to keep in mind that Tahaad pedestrian for is probably the only five-star on that team.

All those kids have had to work so hard to improve and grow. Dylan Cardwell has been in the program five years, Johni Broome three years, Chris Moore five years. We haven't had a lot of transfers. We've had a lot of guys stay.

We've graduated 32 African-American students in the last 10 years. I don't think anybody in the country can say that. We've graduated 40 kids in the last 10 years, and we're proud of that. There's a correlation, I believe, between the discipline and the accountability and the responsibility to be Auburn men.

You heard the kids talking about Auburn over and over and over again, what that means. It means responsibility there.

Now, we don't always represent the way we'd like to, but I think that there's definitely some reasons why we scheduled up as hard as we possibly could, because I wanted to give these kids the opportunity. Now we've got to see if we can take advantage of it.

Q. Penny said he still remembered playing you guys from two years ago, specifically playing against Johni, and the biggest takeaway he had was the difference in how focused and how locked in Johni was today versus when you played two years ago. How have you seen him make that evolution and how much of a statement is that of the growth he's made in that capacity?

BRUCE PEARL: Yeah, Johni has grown a great deal. I know that he's a big guy, okay. Let's just say Johni is 22 years old, so let's say I got him when he was 19. He was a young 19, even though he's a large man. He was young. He's the youngest of a few kids in that family, and he's grown up. He's matured.

One of the things he talked about is Coach trusts me. I try to hold him accountable. I try to have high expectation for them. So we knock heads, because I'm not satisfied. I know you're capable of more.

But he's responded really, really, really well to that. But he's matured. He's become a really good leader on this team. He won't let us celebrate this too much. We'll celebrate it for a day or two right now and have a happier Thanksgiving, and then when we travel back, we'll get back to work.