

# American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 11, 2022

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

**Memphis Tigers**  
**Penny Hardaway**  
**Jalen Duren**  
**Lester Quinones**  
**DeAndre Williams**

Postgame Press Conference

Memphis 85, UCF 69

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah. First of all, very hard game. The first game of the tournament is always the hardest. It's just you don't know what to expect. You've been waiting on this game. You played each other at least once. In this case we played them two times. And they beat us at their place and we beat them at our place and we knew that they were going to be ready.

It was a little shocking to me how we started we started off on fire and got the lead out, and then the momentum shifted and then they got on fire. At the end of the day I was telling the guys that it's March Madness and that's what happens in these type of tournaments. You have to stay the course and stay together, and they did that and brought the win home.

**Q. Penny, in that second half I think it was 46-42, Dre gets the steal, A-Lo hits the three, steals the inbound, Lester hits another three. Was that the game-defining sequence to you?**

PENNY HARDAWAY: Absolutely. That sequence was what Memphis basketball is all about. I think earlier in season, I don't know if that play happens. Honestly, on this stretch, those plays are happening because our hearts are in the right place, our minds are in the right place and we're playing for one another.

But both unbelievable plays, his three and his steal for the next three. That was definitely a momentum shift for us to go back in the right direction.



**Q. Jalen, you finished with 21 points, 20 rebounds. First conference game as freshman. You set a new conference record with 21 rebounds. How does that feel as your first game in the conference tournament?**

JALEN DUREN: Very happy to get the win, move on to the next game.

**Q. What was your reaction to Jalen's performance tonight?**

PENNY HARDAWAY: He's been saying he's going to do that. That's just his greatness. He's a guy that wants to do whatever it takes to win, and I can tell when he's locked in. He was really locked in because we want to get to that -- all of these guys do but JD reclassing up and coming into the team and then it's not going as well early, he could have folded and said, I'm not going to go as hard, but he's gotten better and better every week. Getting 21 rebounds and 20 points, he's getting better every game. That just shows his greatness.

**Q. Hey, Lester, career high, 22 points tonight. Was there something in the game plan that you exploited tonight or was it just you had the hot hand and you, you know, teammates were finding you?**

LESTER QUINONES: I mean, yeah, it really wasn't no game plan. It was kind of just my teammates finding me and as usual A-Lo had 7 assists. I feel like he did a good job tonight controlling the game, really just facilitating and being that veteran guard we needed. Yeah, like you said, it was my teammates finding me and I was just hot today.

**Q. Hey Coach, other than the first minutes of the second half you did well on turnovers, I think you had two or three in a 45-second spread and you dominated the boards. Is this the to advance to the championship game?**

PENNY HARDAWAY: Well, yeah, you've got to be able to handle the ball and not turn the ball over. Obviously when we're winning and doing well, the ball is in A-Lo's hands and he's orchestrating everything, and the guys are being

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the receivers of that. When we start getting wild, it's everybody touching the ball everybody trying to do too much, and we give teams opportunities to get out on fast breaks.

For us to win we've got to control our tempo defensively and offensively and protect the basketball and keep sharing the basketball.

**Q. This is a question for any or all of the players: What was it that clicked? You came out hot. UCF got on a run and then they kind of closed in on the lead, and then you guys kind of clicked again and pulled away. What was that that kind of made that separation?**

DeANDRE WILLIAMS: I would say we just started getting stops when they tried to get on the run. And we executed off of it.

PENNY HARDAWAY: I think she wanted all three of you guys.

LESTER QUINONES: I mean, like piggybacking off of what Dre said, Coach kind of kept us poised and letting us know this is a game of runs. This is March, teams are going to give it its all, and we've just got to buckle down and stay locked in on the game plan and follow through.

LESTER QUINONES: Yeah. I feel like it just goes to our defense. I feel like we're kind of known for our defense and Coach likes to say our defense travels. That's something that we lock in on every single game and really just follow the game plan that he gives us.

**Q. Coach, I think after the second SMU loss you said you wanted to see these guys again. You got your wish. How important and how big is this game going to be for you all?**

PENNY HARDAWAY: When the rankings finished on who played who, we knew we were going to have to see them again in we win our first-round match, and we knew we'd face those guys because we finished second and third.

So they've done a fantastic job of how they played. I have a lot respect for them. They play great basketball. They spread you out and they go. As a coach and competitor you look forward to games that are going to be competitive, and they bring every ounce of thinking, playing out of you, the best out of you if you're going to try to beat them. So I enjoy those games.

**Q. DeAndre, I'm curious piggybacking off of that, what is it about SMU that you think gave you guys trouble in**

**those two games this year?**

DeANDRE WILLIAMS: What Coach just said, they spread you, they play smart. They find the mismatches and they just know how to play good basketball.

**Q. Lester, what does it mean to you, this is the only team that's beaten you in 50 days I think. What does it mean to get a chance to avenge those losses?**

LESTER QUINONES: Really just focusing on going 1-0 in our next game.

**Q. I forget which player has played or not played against SMU this year.**

PENNY HARDAWAY: DeAndre didn't play in the first game but these guys played in both.

**Q. Okay. So I guess Jalen, what did you learn from those two losses? You learn from losses. What did you learn in those two losses?**

JALEN DUREN: Honestly just what type of team they are. Like Coach said, they're a very good basketball club. We've just got to come out and handle business honestly. I know it's going to be a competitive game. Like I said, they beat us two times already. We've just got to lock in. I learned that they're just a great team and we've got to stay focused.

**Q. Lester, going back to that second East Carolina game at home, you said you were working on your confidence, staying confident, and you've been on this tear, career high. Mentally how good of a space do you feel like you're in right now?**

LESTER QUINONES: I feel like I'm in a great space and with this being crunchtime in the season, I feel like the only thing I'm focused on now is winning the game. Whether it's my night or not, that's what I feel like is our weapon on this team. It could be anybody's night coming out and tonight was my night.

My teammates just found me and it's just great to be a part of something like that, where everybody could get going, everybody just feels good.

**Q. JD, I think in the first half DeAndre made a play and you and the rest of the team met them at half-court. You almost got a technical, the whole team came out. Describe the chemistry seeing your other player do well. You all beat him out to half-court. How did the chemistry develop over the last three months?**

JALEN DUREN: It's developed a lot. Early on having a lot of injuries, wasn't really able to develop on-court chemistry with a lot of the guys. So coming back these last couple months and having the whole team back and being able to really build some bonds with the guys on the court helped us become closer on and off the court. That's why you see those type of things. We're just happy to get the win and happy to keep moving on.

**Q. For Penny: Last year you won on your postseason run. You didn't have A-Lo and you didn't have Jalen Duren. Obviously went on a pretty good run anyway. What do those two bring to the team that you didn't have in the postseason last year?**

PENNY HARDAWAY: Toughness, they bring toughness, willingness to do whatever it takes for us to win. They don't really care about scoring, they just want to win the game. They're both ultimate winners. A-Lo has won his entire career. Jalen has won his entire career. So they bring that winning atmosphere, they bring the toughness and whatever it takes to win, that's what they bring.

**Q. Penny you went with the Memphis State jerseys, is this a postseason thing?**

PENNY HARDAWAY: I kind of like the Memphis State jerseys. I'm kind of biased. Nothing against the University of Memphis obviously. I like the Memphis State look of the jerseys.

**Q. Penny, what can you say about this conference in and of itself, the talent level of it and if you're surprised that it doesn't get the respect that it deserves nationally and that there is this question in the bubble when it comes to the American?**

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah. That's really unfortunate because I was talking this morning about how they disrespect our conference. They're picking 7 and 8 teams from conferences that have lost 7, 8 games in a row. They're respecting that conference that much. They really don't give us the respect that we deserve. We have some really good teams and really good talent in this conference and I just don't know why they're not looking at what we have. I'm watching all the games around the country and all of these different conference tournaments. And I'm like, man, our teams in this conference could play well in those conference tournaments as well.

So it's really baffling what's really going on with that. I don't know whose idea it was or who decision that the AAC is not good, but they're wrong.

**Q. And then just to look at the fact of you not only**

**winning at Memphis but winning in a place that's so near and dear to your heart. Just what it is to have that Memphis Tiger on your chest, your whole life growing up, to be connected to it and to be connected to it right now as the head coach and get to see these young men do what they're doing?**

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, this is the dream come true for me. It's full circle from when I played. I went to the NCAA Tournament and made it to the Elite 8. Never thought I would be the head coach right now. But being in this position and having our guys kind of be in the same position that I was in and I can be there to lead them and try to get them to a higher level, man, it feels great. Being at home, being at my alma mater, having this jersey on myself and watching them go out there and play, you know, I talk to Coach Finch all the time through prayer, and I know he's smiling down on us right now.

**Q. This first one is for Coach Penny. Coach, you mentioned coming out to a hot start and then UCF brought it within two at one point. Was there anything you said to the guys or any sort of moment that you had with them in a timeout or anything like that that helped kind of make them realize, hey, you need to put the foot the down?**

PENNY HARDAWAY: I just told them this is March Madness. If you've been watching games around the country, I think more teams more so than ever from December until now or November until now have won games being down 18, 17, 18 points, and in their conference tournament. So I just said it's March Madness that's what comes along with that.

We've got to get some stops, got to get to the foul line, and try to get into the penalty and stop this run. All teams are going to make runs during this month. That's why it's March Madness.

**Q. For Lester, really quick: As the guard on the panel, I have to ask this, you mentioned you had the hot hand and when they came down on Jalen, you were there to launch it in there. As the guard on the panel, Lester, I want you to rate Jalen's alley-ooop to DeAndre?**

LESTER QUINONES: That was a 20 out of 10. I really feel like that was really our play of the year really. You really don't see that too often when you have a 5 man who can just catch a loose ball like that, falling really, off balance and just throw it up at the rim and really make a play out of nothing for real. That was really an amazing play by them.

PENNY HARDAWAY: I thought it was a shot. I'm joking.



