

# American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 11, 2022

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

**UCF Knights**

**Johnny Dawkins**

**Darius Perry**

**Dre Fuller Jr**

Postgame Press Conference

Memphis 85, UCF 69

JOHNNY DAWKINS: Well, it's always difficult, you know. This is our last game. I think we played a team that's playing their best basketball right now in Memphis. I was very impressed with the way they played on both sides of the ball, defensively and offensively. Really felt their presence out there.

I thought our team did some really good things to come back and give us a chance in the second half. And we made a good run and give them credit, they turned around and made another run themselves. And like I say, I thought both teams played their hearts out, which is what you want to see in this type of environment and I couldn't be more proud of our guys and their effort.

**Q. Coach, Memphis got off to a really hot start. What do you say to your team to make sure they stayed calm and stay in the game? And when you cut it to two points what did you tell your guys to try to get over the hump?**

JOHNNY DAWKINS: Well when we were down, I just wanted our guys to make sure they knew there was still a lot of basketball to be played. It was early in the first half. We know we're capable of coming back. We've come back in a number of games before. So our guys have been in that position.

When we cut it to two, told our guys understand it's a different ball game. Stay composed. We're no longer playing catch-up. At that point just playing possession by possession and continue to lock in and doing the things



we're doing defensively and turn that into offense.

**Q. We saw this resiliency yesterday as you fought with the two-point victory over USF. What was the message to the team down 21, to come back and nail it in get down to two, what was the message to your team going into that final stretch there?**

JOHNNY DAWKINS: Same thing I was telling the gentleman right there, what we wanted to do was we knew there was a lot of game to be played. We wanted to continue chipping away at the lead. And our guys did a good job of that. We wanted to continue to play our game, which is a 94-foot game, pressuring the basketball, trying to get up and down in transition. We were able to do some of that.

When we cut the lead to two, we told our guys we're back in the ball game. Let's just keep our composure. Let's make sure that we understand that now it's more possession by possession. We're not playing catch-up anymore. Let's come down and execute make sure we continued to play defense that allowed us to get back in the ball game.

**Q. Coach, your team took it to the wire on Thursday night. You battled back in this one. But was your bench just too short? Did you get tired there towards the end there in the second half?**

JOHNNY DAWKINS: You know I'm not an excuse guy. I thought we had enough. Our guys have big hearts. They love to compete. I would like to have had more of our players available absolutely. Unfortunately that's just not the way it is in our sport. But our guys gave us everything they had, and I'm just really proud of them. It was a two-point ball game with probably 16 or some minutes to go in the second half, playing against a team that's as hot as probably any team not just in our conference but in the country, as far as I'm concerned, from what I've seen. And I thought our guys gave a great effort.

**Q. At 18 and 12, do you think your team has done enough has enough of a resume to earn a postseason berth in some tournament?**

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JOHNNY DAWKINS: I'm always hopeful. We'll see. I think if you look at our resume, you look at our preseason schedule and the teams that we played, you look at our conference record, .500, you know, in conference in a very good conference, we'll see. That's up to other people to make that decision. But if we could keep playing, I would love to. I'm sure our guys would like to keep competing as well.

**Q. Dre, for you, what was it like to go against Memphis's press defense tonight?**

DRE FULLER: The same as usual. We played them three times. So we've got to keep our composure against their press and just don't rush. Don't rush to try to get the ball out of our hands quickly. They have athletic guys. We just have to keep our composure and stay sane.

**Q. That same question to you. 18 and 12. Do you think this team as done enough in its resume to get a postseason bid somewhere?**

DRE FULLER: Some would you say no, but I would say yes.

**Q. Coach, what was the message to Darius Perry who finished with 23 points, 7 assists? What were you saying to younger guard leading your team through that comeback?**

JOHNNY DAWKINS: Well, with Darius, I was just really proud. He did a great job of leading Darius Perry that is. I thought he stepped up as well as a senior and led by example. With Darius Johnson, I think he's a talented young freshman. He has a lot of room to grow. Like any freshman, he has things he has to continue to work on and learn. I was talking to him throughout the game making sure he stayed composed, stayed within our system things that we were trying to do offensively and defensively, wanted to make sure he stayed locked into that. Like any freshman, he's going to make some mistakes. But I never have to question where his heart is and I never have to question his work ethic. I know he's going to bring those every time he steps on the floor.

**Q. Coach, you were talking about Darius Perry and his heart. While it may not have been in a win, this is the kind of game that we've seen from Darius Perry playing at UCF. Do you think this is for him kind of a -- despite it being a good loss, do you think this was a good send off performance for him?**

JOHNNY DAWKINS: Well, no, absolutely. I thought he played some of his best basketball in this tournament,

yesterday and today. And that's what you want to see. And so I was really proud of him for that. He stepped up. He led in that regard. And definitely that's what you want to see. And I just thanked him.

I thanked all our seniors for what they've done for us in our program. They've been terrific stewards as far as on and off the court, how they've led in the classroom, as well as what they've done in practice and in games. So I just wanted to thank them, and I thanked them all for what they've done at the end of the game.

**Q. Johnny, assuming this is the last game for you guys, if that happens or not who knows, but if it is the last game for this program, what comes next for this team moving forward in the off season?**

JOHNNY DAWKINS: We have to really be focused in the offseason. We have to continue to get better. We have a number of seniors that will be departing. And so, of course, we're bringing in some younger players. And we'll be looking to bring in some more experienced players to balance our team out. But the main thing is it's all about getting better. We have to use the lessons that we've learned from this season and in this tournament. And we have to grow from it. And the players that are returning that were in that locker room, I think they understand that.

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