

# American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 12, 2022

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

**Memphis Tigers**  
**Penny Hardaway**  
**Earl Timberlake**  
**Alex Lomax**  
**Landus Nolley II**

Postgame Press Conference

Memphis 70, SMU 63

PENNY HARDAWAY: First, I'd say thank God for this opportunity to even be here in this situation. We've come a long ways. And to be in a point right now to be in the semifinal game of conference, playing against a really well coached and really good SMU team that's beaten us twice already this year. To be able to come in and understand that it's pretty much a home game for them and still beat them here with everything at stake, with them having the opportunity to making it to the NCAA us having an opportunity to making it to the NCAA. For the guys to face adversity throughout the game, have a lead, face adversity and then come out on top with push through with everything that happened, Jalen getting injured, Tyler catching a cramp, DeAndre fouling out, I couldn't be more proud of these guys. They did a heck of a job

**Q. Question for Earl and Penny: Obviously with everything you said Jalen, DeAndre's foul trouble you needed someone to step up. What can you say about Earl's performance?**

PENNY HARDAWAY: We understand -- we call him "Easy," he's easygoing but we know he has game and he was ready for his moment. He was ready for his opportunity. I told him it can be an obligation or an opportunity. He seized the moment and took advantage of an opportunity and came in and played big for us, man. I'm really proud of him.

He's been waiting his turn and tonight he showed what -- well, we already know what he can do but he showed up



for us and played really, really well

**Q. Two things, Penny: There was a lot of things that happened that had to happen for you guys to win. But if you picked the most important thing, what was it? And then just the whole sequence with Jalen going down, going out, coming back and then what's his status? Take us through that.**

PENNY HARDAWAY: I can honestly say that in the first half Earl comes in, I had been looking at him the entire first half and nodded to him and told him I was going to put him in. He got in and got a tip-in. Right before the end of the half, he made a heck of a block that could have changed momentum for them, and when he got that block, those are just winning plays. To me that's the biggest play of the game, he got a tip-in and he came back. Right before the end of the half, Josh got beat off the dribble and he went in and blocked it before the end of the half, to take us into the half with momentum

Yeah, Jalen man, I saw that he fell really hard. He hit the court really hard. He didn't get the cushion on Kendrick Davis, you know. He goes in there and he tries to throw his body into him and he was up so high, he hit the bottom. When he fell, I was hoping his shoulder, his hand, nothing was broken. He'll be a little sore but we'll take that over anything being broken.

**Q. Is it a sprain?**

PENNY HARDAWAY: He just has it taped right now. They haven't told us exactly what it was. I just know it's going to be sore. We'll know more tonight.

**Q. Coming into this game you were 11-2 over the last 13, and those two losses happened to come to SMU. First off, how good did this feel to get it against them and do you feel like you're peaking at the right time now?**

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, the first game we didn't have everybody. They're still a good team. I've always respected their culture, how they play. They're very smart and obviously they're well coached. The first game I knew

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it was going to be tough for us to win because we were undermanned and the guys fought their butts off because there's about five 1,000 point scorers in that lineup. It's going to be hard for freshmen to beat them.

We came into SMU with high hopes because we were on a streak and they just beat us handily. Kendric took over the game and Marcus Weathers took over the game and the rest of the guys played unbelievable defense and did what they had to do. I didn't play the game plan I wanted to play against them in either game, and I went back to what we were doing last year against Kendric, making his life hard, and we went back to what we used to do and it worked. It does make this win feel much better. We didn't want to go down 0-3 to those guys and we really wanted to show what we were all about as well.

**Q. Coach, a couple questions: Obviously we're far from Memphis but Memphis fans flooded the stands today, even chanting. So did this at all feel like a home game for you guys, being that Memphis showed up in a way that was massive here at Dickies Arena? And then the second question is can you speak to A-Lo's performance with those crazy defensive plays throughout the course of the game?**

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah. It does seem like a home game. We saw the sea of blue and our fans came out to really support and we really appreciate that because this is a home game for SMU, and our fans came out to make noise and to give our guys the energy and it helped a lot.

And with A-Lo nothing surprised me about him. He's a winner. We always talk about winners winning. He just makes winning plays the entire game.

**Q. Penny, this is your fourth year, this is your first time going to the championship game. What emotions are you feeling going to your first championship game?**

PENNY HARDAWAY: I feel great. If you'd have asked us a month ago, I mean, three months ago, you know, we would have been saying, yeah, we're going to be there and then we went through the struggle. But now it just feels great because we're playing the type of -- Memphis basketball. Our defense is traveling and any time we have that, I'm great.

But I'm feeling really good behind this. I'm going to enjoy this win tonight, but we know we have a tough Houston team. Being the championship, yeah, I feel great

**Q. For Penny: Did going through the struggles that you went through this year help? In other words, you**

**saw all the resilience that you built up this year sort of come to play today. Did that help today?**

PENNY HARDAWAY: It does. Everything that we went through. From the Georgia game how we lost, from the ECU game how we lost, how we gave up a bunch of points to Murray State in the second half, a 50-point half for them to win. Playing against a team last night that -- all the experiences that we had with the nine losses are coming into play right now when we get into adversity because we've been there before

**Q. And then for A-Lo did you take it personally to lock up Kendric? What's your approach there? And what's it like as someone who had to sit out last during this postseason to be a part of it, popping your Memphis jersey and "whoop that trick" and everything else?**

ALEX LOMAX: I most definitely took the match-up personally. We play the same position and he's the Player of the Year, and I go in and just want to be a great defender. So I wanted to make that match-up personal. And I talked to Coach about that, no matter what I just wanted to stay on him.

And also right before the game we saw a couple quotes that they said as in they felt like they had already won the game before it happened. So they just added fuel to the fire, and that was just something that really just stayed on my mind especially coming into the game today.

After sitting out last year, especially coming into the same practice arenas when I couldn't even run full speed, and now we're going into there and I'm able to be on the court, I'm just very thankful just to be more healthy than I was last year and just to see the fans come out and being able to give my all for Memphis. That's just the most important thing for me every day.

**Q. For any of the players: Coach mentioned obviously Jalen got a couple of early fouls and then got hurt later on. Dandridge and Williams both got into foul trouble. Was there any point where you thought maybe this wasn't your day or are you surprised to be sitting here getting ready for a championship game tomorrow?**

ALEX LOMAX: Like you all said earlier, with the nine losses we've been through a lot of different things. Practice, we always play small sometimes. So we had a lot of experience in those aspects and did a great job of adjusting, with Coach Penny putting us in the right situations to weather the storm. And we never looked down or got down or looked rattled. We're a very experienced team from last season and this season. So we just always stay forward and just weather the storm.



**Q. This is for Penny and maybe Landers too: You're down 55-51. It's like a media timeout or something. And you guys came out and goes to what you're saying generally but what did you do you think offensively, defensively in those final six minutes where it felt like that ultimately that's where you won the game?**

PENNY HARDAWAY: For us, we just kept the ball in the same players' hand and they capitalized. They missed a lot of small shots, little bunnies around the rim. Missed a lot of shots. It was winning time and they made baskets in the time that we needed them to make them. They had missed them the entire time, and then finally started making them at the end. We ran the same plays, they just capitalized on them

**Q. Landers, what was that like for you? In the first half it seemed like you missed a whole bunch of shots you've been making lately. How did that last stretch feel to really kind of gut out a win when things were stacked against you?**

LANDERS NOLLEY II: For me it felt good because Coach kept his trust in me. The players they all kept finding me, and I just tried to find a way to come through for them.

**Q. This one's for Penny and then any individual player that wanted to touch on it. DeAndre once he fouled out, he wasn't a non-factor in the game. He had energy on the bench, he was talking guys up. Can you speak to the veteran leadership he was showing late in the game?**

PENNY HARDAWAY: We know Dre, he felt like he let us down. So the one thing he could do was cheer and be on the sideline keeping the energy positive, and that's what he was going to do. He wasn't going to sit over there and pout because he fouled out. He wanted us to win the game to have a second chance at it. And when his teammates started playing well, when we were down 4 with 6:55 on the clock, he was just getting the guys back up.

That's what you need. You need the selflessness instead of the selfishness. In today's game most players would have been over there pouting because they fouled out. That's just who DeAndre Williams is, he's a total team player

Earl Timberlake, everybody.

**Q. I don't have a question for Earl though. This is for Coach right here: You had two players go down. For us it really looked like they weren't going to come**

**back. What was the conversation like when they said, Coach, I want to come back? And how is that a testament to not only the character but the heart of your team?**

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah. When I went over to Jalen, he was crying. I was like, Oh, my God. This has to be bad because he's tough. And he was like, My shoulder. Then he was like, I can't feel my hand. I was like, Is anything broke? I'm like the doctor, I'm checking him out to make sure nothing was broken. When nothing was broken, I said, Come on, get up. It's time to get up. Nothing's broken.

When he went to the back, I knew he was going to come back. I knew he was going to back there, he was not going to let us play without him if anything wasn't broken. I knew he was going to come back

And with Tyler, he got a cramp and definitely wanted to come back in the game, but it just showed that those guys want to win. They want to be on the court and be there for their teammates. Shows they're tough as well.

**Q. Earl, kind of what Penny was talking about earlier. When you came in, did you sense what was going on with JD, what was going on with Dre, that you needed to do what you did today?**

EARL TIMBERLAKE: Yeah. Coach preaches, be ready for your moment. And I was ready, you know. I got to play today (laughter).

**Q. Earl, I mean, obviously, I would assume you follow college basketball at this time of year and have for a long time. This is the sort of thing you see at this time of year, somebody who steps up when their team needs them. How do you feel about that being you tonight?**

EARL TIMBERLAKE: It's just a blessing. I just wanted to be ready for my moment, just wanted to be there for my teammates. And overall I just want to win any way I can, help the team

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