

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 10, 2023

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Memphis Tigers

Penny Hardaway

Kendric Davis

DeAndre Williams

Postgame Press Conference

Memphis - 81, UCF - 76

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from coach and then take questions.

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah. I'm really excited because I know how hard it is to win a basketball game and how much harder it is to win in March. UCF, their record doesn't indicate how good they really are. They had an injury to their point guard and they tried to do it by committee, injury to their big man. They hit a skid at one point where they lost three or four in a row. I don't know what was really going on, but that's a really good basketball team, and I'm proud of my guys for coming out in the -- the toughest game is to get it under your belt because they played last night, was tonight's game, so I'm very excited about the win.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions.

Q. Good win, but talk about how DeAndre and Kendric played because when I'm looking at the game, it's not only that they refused to let y'all lose, they just refused to let Central Florida win the ball game with how they played tonight.

PENNY HARDAWAY: Absolutely, both ways. They refused to lose and they refused to let Central Florida win the game. These guys are killers, man. I keep saying the same thing. That's what their built for, they're built for moments like this, and they're closers, and they both closed today and I'm proud of both of them because they understand what the magnitude of what all of this is.

KD's never made the NCAA tournament, so he's showing



his hunger, like, I'm not ready to go home. You lose that game, man, it's not good for him or Dre's resume. And you got to win these type of games and that's what they did.

Q. Same question for both of you.

KENDRIC DAVIS: I try to play with a chip on my shoulder. Coach be on us hard, telling us we got to set the tempo. He called us in the office. Like, this is personal, and my mindset is, like, I remember what C.J. Kelly said, you know, at UCF, like, we had to show Memphis who in time and I take that personal.

I got hurt the second game and it was on my mind that I wanted them to win last game. So I just play with that chip on my shoulder and I ain't want to lose.

DEANDRE WILLIAMS: Basically the same thing. We knew we had to go out there and perform for the team to win. We had that mindset all game. We made big plays throughout the whole game. So we want to continue to play like this all tournament.

Q. Was there a particular moment in this game that stands out to you, that you're walking off the floor and you're kind of replaying in your head, like this was the, like that moment, whatever it was, was the defining moment of this game?

KENDRIC DAVIS: Yeah, they made their run, and C.J. Kelly said something to Coach during the run, like, yeah, Penny, or something he said, and it pissed me off, like for real. I'm like, all right, let's lock back in.

And if you know Coach, you know we don't take that too well at Memphis. So, man, it just turned me up a bit and we got it done.

Q. It kind of got underneath the skin, but earlier in the season you made a comment saying that you was a bad you know what. So do you think you kind of proved that tonight, along with DeAndre? I mean, you did your thing as well.

KENDRIC DAVIS: Man, we just playing ball. You know

... when all is said, we're done.®

what I'm saying? Like, I leave it up to y'all. I just play ball and I feel like I'm, you know, the best in the country because I work hard at it. But, man, like Penny always said, you got to have that swagger. If you know Penny, you know he got that swagger.

So I came here to get that swagger and I'm getting that swagger, I guess. (Laughing.)

Q. How soon did you know that it would work this well between you, that you would play so well together this year?

DEANDRE WILLIAMS: We knew that from the beginning of the season, I mean, when he came here, just the tandem, we got the duo we got, all season we got so many different options out of our two-man game. We trust Coach's leadership. And we're ballplayers, like coach said, and we're going to get it done, no matter how we do it.

Q. I know this time of year you have a short memory because you have 19 hours to prepare. What's your message to the team going forward? And secondly, I know he don't care about being the Player of the Year, but what's your thought about him not getting Player of the Year?

PENNY HARDAWAY: For me, my message to the team was, we don't know who is going to win, but we know we got to battle. We played an efficient game tonight. You got to repeat it again tomorrow, no matter who you face. It could be a zone because of Tulane. It could be man and zone with Wichita. So we don't know who we're going to face yet.

But for us, we got to worry about us. There's some things on this stat sheet that we got to shore up for us to continue to win and cut the nets on Sunday, cut the nets down.

And as far as Kendric not getting Player of the Year, for me, he deserved it. I ride with my guy at all times, like all the other coaches are supposed to. He works hard enough. He's put us in position all year to win. That's just going to be my thing. I'm riding with my guy.

Q. You mentioned the experience these guys had with the will to put them on their back. 68 of the teams 81 points tonight came from Kendric and DeAndre. How important at this time of the year is it to have those two seniors that really has that veteran experience to push late in this tournament?

PENNY HARDAWAY: It's very important because the players, I was in their role. You can't miss a game. You got to show up every night, no matter what it is. Teams

can't shut you down. You can't have bad shooting nights. If you do, you got to get to the foul line. You got to do whatever it takes to get that victory, whether it's rebounding, charges, assists, points. You just can't be shut down. So it's so important for them to be playing on the level that they're playing right now.

Q. You discussed how important it is for them to play well, but to cut the nets, like you said, on Sunday, how important is it for everyone else to step up down the stretch?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Extremely important, which leads me to understand, obviously, that we had injuries this year, and guys have always stepped up all season. They stepped up, next man up. A Lo went out, Malcolm went out, now Keonte's out. You got Jayden, you got Chandler, you got Damaria, and you got Eli, and you got Kao. Those guys have to step up. It's so important for them to come in and play a role, spacing the floor for them and knocking down shots, taking charges, rebounding, doing all the little bitty things that they're supposed to be doing to help support these two up here.

Q. You started the game extremely aggressive and playing very well, getting your shots at the basket. When UCF is making those runs in the second half and cut it close, what are you saying to your teammates to try to push that lead back forward in your favor?

DEANDRE WILLIAMS: Just basically stay locked in. We know other teams are going to make a run. That's just basketball. But we got to make sure that we stay locked in and consistent the whole time when they make that run because it's easily, I mean, it's easy to, you know, get down on yourself when a team make that run. But when you're together and you got your teammates' back you got to continue to tell them to stay consistent.

Q. You obviously have been part of this program forever. Can you remember the last time two Tigers scored 30 points in a game?

PENNY HARDAWAY: No, I can't remember. We've had some good teams, but it was always one defining guy that did all the scoring pretty much, and I can't remember -- the closest would be CDR and Derrick Rose era, maybe somebody did, but I don't think that era, I just don't remember this.

Q. How nice is it to have two?

PENNY HARDAWAY: It's very nice. It's the main reason why I recruited Kendric very hard because while DeAndre was weighing his options on what he was going to do, I

figured if I got Kendrick, it would help him understand that he needed to come back. And to me, these are the two best players in our league, two of the best players in the country, closers, in my mind. And the stats showed it tonight.

Q. Then finally, how important is it to have players who don't mind them taking the leadership role? In other words, they're not, it doesn't appear like they're jealous or they want their shots. There was a point where they had scored all but one point in the second half.

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, well, that's the reason why we are where we are right now. The team was strategically put together so that we wouldn't have any jealousy, we wouldn't have anyone getting mad if they weren't getting shots, that they would continue to work. And it's worked out beautifully. That's why I say, this has been my best team because nobody's really worrying about what they're doing, because we've had that before and it's not fun to be there.

Q. Kendrick, when they took that lead, they took y'all's 10-point lead and kind of vanished it made midway through the second half, C.J. Kelly hit three free throws, you hit back-to-back threes. What's that moment feel like for you, that sense of urgency?

KENDRIC DAVIS: Like I said, they made their run and got to talking crazy and, like I'm telling you, one thing about it, I hate that. Just took it up on us to get stops. We got stops. Jay got out and pushed the break fast. Like coach said, we wanted to push, and he been telling me all day, run it. If you don't get it, just run it. And I just ran it and then Jay found me on one, and then the second one just the rhythm off that first one, and I just let it go.

Q. Obviously you had a stellar year last year, but there's been times where you're looking like one of the best bigs in the country this season. Bringing a guy like Kendrick into y'all's locker room, how much has that helped elevate your game?

DEANDRE WILLIAMS: It's humongous, man. He does a lot for our team. Like coach said, he's a closer and some nights he can just come out and just score at will, and then other nights he can just get everybody involved. So he's is real versatile, he's an impact player, and just, I love playing with him.

Q. Did A Lo, not being able to come back, did that throw a wrench into the game plan at all? And then secondly, is there an update on his status?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, absolutely it threw a monkey wrench in our program because, and in our game plan, because he's one of our best defenders, if not on ball. He's not a hundred percent, but he'd be guarding those guys that were getting those layups and they wouldn't have done that on him. Obviously Kelly and Horton those guys are really good, especially C.J. Kelly off the dribble. But he did, it hurt us when he said that he couldn't move out there on the floor. So we'll try to get him some treatment tonight. He did not say he wasn't playing tomorrow, but he just couldn't finish today's game.

Q. Guys obviously more games to play, but for each of you, this is a performance collectively that's going to go down in the record books and the history of Memphis basketball as one of the all-time great performances by a duo. Just, quite simply, how do each of you put into words what you guys were able to put together tonight?

KENDRIC DAVIS: We just want to win. Tonight it was us scoring the ball, tomorrow it might be me finding guys. So just want to do whatever we got to do to win. I'm lucky to have a coach, because today he told me, You got to be aggressive today. Most days he tell me what I got to do and today I was just aggressive like he said and it just worked out. But tomorrow it might be my other teammates be more aggressive. But as long as we get the win, that's all that matter.

DEANDRE WILLIAMS: Basically the same thing Kendrick just said. We know we those guys that we got to go out there and make big plays all game and that's what we do. We have our mindset set on that and following coach's lead, and we just got to make sure we finish out this season the right way and that's cutting the nets down for the city.

Q. Coach, earlier you spoke about players stepping up throughout the season. Talk specifically about Jayden and how he's not only stepped up as a player in this offense but also as just a young man.

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, Jayden has done a terrific job because he waits his turn. He's a total teammate. He's going to be the guy that's cheering everybody on when he's not in the game. When he gets in the game he's going to pretty much do everything right. He's going to defend, he's going to be in the right areas, he's going to talk, he's going to do the things that you need to win. And you always, even though he's my son, he's a really great teammate and he's willing to do whatever it takes. And his role was big tonight because he had to be the guy at the end of the game trying to get stops. We need that. He's a guy that just has to step up and do whatever it takes every

single night whether it's pumping guys up, whether it's getting the ball to these two guys, whether it's knocking down shots. Tomorrow might be his night scoring. Today was his night, well today was his day to defend.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

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