

# American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 11, 2023

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

## Memphis Tigers Coach Penny Hardaway Kendric Davis DeAndre Williams

Postgame Press Conference

Memphis - 94, Tulane - 54

THE MODERATOR: Coach, welcome back. Coach, congratulations on advancing to the final. We'll begin with an opening statement and then we'll take questions.

COACH HARDAWAY: Couldn't be more proud of these guys. Locked in. Tulane beat us two times during the season. And had an opportunity to come into our building on a big day. I never forget that day. That was the day my head coach was being honored and Lorenzen Wright's jersey was being retired. And stained in my brain and on my heart from that day, man, we let our city down. We got to come back and fight. And they swept us during the regular season. We came back ready today and just proud of the performance. Couldn't have dreamt this type of a win up. Because they are a really good team, but we put a good game plan together. And man, it was beautiful.

**Q. KD, this has got to be special for you. I know they have been talking to you guys all season. What did this mean for you winning this time versus losing the previous two times.**

KENDRIC DAVIS: We said the same thing. UCF talk crazy. Coach pulled out the tweet of what Tulane said to us. And we Memphis, man, we didn't take that lightly. And we wanted to show up today.

**Q. KD, another question. Have you ever -- or did you ever think that one day you would be facing against your hometown team in a championship game in Houston?**

KENDRIC DAVIS: Yeah, when I came here that was the



goal. Coach promised me championships in the tournament. And everybody know you have to get through them to get there, so -- I mean, this is what we dreamt of. When I first said I was coming here, this is the moment we dreamt of. So it's going to be a dog fight. And we just got to be ready.

**Q. Coach Hardaway, just talk about this 40-point win. This is one of those performances you have been wanting your team to come out, get on top of somebody and stay on them. Do you think this is the most impressive win this season?**

COACH HARDAWAY: It is the most impressive, especially with what was at stake. Tulane's confidence was high against us, and rightfully so because they beat us two times in the regular season. We didn't have Malcolm either game. I thought that would make a difference. But the rest of the crew came to play. Next man up. Malcolm wasn't really feeling well. But we put bodies out there and everybody contributed. And these guys, man, they came to play. They knew what it meant. And this was the most complete win of the season for sure.

**Q. This is for both Kendric and DeAndre, can you both take me through that dunk, what you saw, and DeAndre, where it ranks on your personal list?**

DeANDRE WILLIAMS: Man, that was great. Me and KD made eye contact in the game, saw the guy was helping a little bit. And he threw it perfect. And I just gave a great effort and caught it.

KENDRIC DAVIS: No. That's not what happened. Nah. He made a great play on the ball, but we did walk-through this morning, and Coach told us that first man that could, they ball watch, and the second will be there. And he cut it and the dude took him and I threw it up and he made a great play.

**Q. Players, was that the moment in this game that took it to another level for you guys, or was it something else? Was there like a defensive stand or, you know, I don't know, what else it could have been in that moment?**

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DeANDRE WILLIAMS: Well, I mean, that was a spectacular play. That always -- when you do a spectacular play in a game, it always give your team juice. But we already knew we had to be next level as soon as the game started. And so we just had that same mindset the whole game.

KENDRIC DAVIS: Yeah. Piggyback off of what he said, all night you could just feel the energy. For me the turning point was when we scrambled scrambled scrambled and Jay took a charge. And it was, yeah, they locked in. And was on the string defensively. When we guard like that it's hard to score. Get us out in transition and get us going. I think the scramble, scramble, scramble until Jay charged is what I think changed the game. Late first half, yeah

**Q. DeAndre, Kendrick talked about going against his hometown team. It's your hometown team for you. What's it like for you advancing to the tournament going through your hometown team?**

DeANDRE WILLIAMS: It's humongous. It's a dream come true. You don't want to get too high or too low. You want to stay even keeled and make sure yo take care of business. We know the magnitude of this game. And we got all the pieces to get it done.

**Q. You mentioned this was the most impressive game of the year. And obviously last night you had the spectacular performances by them. It felt like everyone today. Do you feel -- you talked about I think earlier in the week, you hadn't quite reached your best level. Do you feel like you are closer than you have ever been to that?**

COACH HARDAWAY: Yeah, in today's game. Last night's game was you know terrific from these guys, going out there and putting on a show. Jump shots, three different levels, fast breaks, dunks, lay-ups, everything. And today, we talked about it last night, it could be a totally different game today, and it was. The rest of the crew came to play today, and they knocked down all these open shots and helped open the floor up for these guys even though they are playing zone. It is our most complete game as a group. It's pretty special because we're starting to play our best basketball right now in March. And that's when you want to be peaking.

**Q. This is for DeAndre or Penny since you were here last year and you had a chance to win this title against Houston. I guess what would this mean to be back in this moment and have another shot at it? How important is it to you guys to win a title tomorrow?**

DeANDRE WILLIAMS: Man, this is very important. This is historic. Like I said earlier, that we know the magnitude of the game. But we just can't get too high at all, and we have to go out there and make sure we're locked in for 40 minutes because we know Houston, they don't stop. They keep pushing and pushing. We have to stay locked in for 40 minutes.

COACH HARDAWAY: Yeah. It's only right to me that we're back here again. That means that we're doing something right, to be back in the championship game of the AAC. UCF was a very tough game and obviously today we had a blow-out game, but we know who Tulane has been and who they are. We know how hard our conference is whether anyone gives us the credit. And to be in this game again -- last year, you know, we were on the high because we felt like we beat them twice, it's always hard to beat a team three times. We're hoping that works for us tomorrow. We know that every game we play against those guys is going to be a battle.

**Q. Kendrick, I'm from Fort Worth. I covered you when you were a freshman at TCU. Two quick questions for you. How do you feel like you are different and a better player and person now since you left TCU? What would it mean to you personally to finally get to the NCAA Tournament?**

KENDRIC DAVIS: I was trying to learn how to play college basketball as a freshman. I didn't really know the magnitude. I didn't know nothing. The game was fast. I couldn't shoot. I just worked on my game. And you know, I'm playing for something now. Like SMU last year, Coach P ruined my dreams. They beat us last year at this game. Woke up this morning kind of nervous because I wanted last year the first game and we lost to them. I can't let that happen again. But I still got room to grow. But defensively, I called Coach today, "I want that challenge." You know, with Cook, felt like on our home floor he was a little too comfortable. And I told Coach today I want that challenge. Just trust it. And he trusted me, and we had a great game plan. And Coach called the meeting today making sure we was locked in for this. And it just showed today. We stayed on them for 40 minutes. And that's the first time we did that all year.

**Q. Question for KD and DeAndre. How much did the disrespect you all might have felt, the embarrassment or whatever it was with the two losses to Tulane, how much did that weigh on you in the past two months and what we saw today, was that a release of all that frustration?**

KENDRIC DAVIS: For me, yeah. I play with a chip on my shoulder. And Forbes was talking crazy to Coach at home,



and we didn't get it done. And I was thinking about like, if we get a chance again, I'm going at him. You know what I'm saying? Something about me, I don't like talking. Let's just hoop. To disrespect Coach on our home floor, that sat on my mind. You know what I'm saying? I told everybody, if it's anything, this is the game I want and we got it done.

**Q. Two questions for Penny. First of all, everybody is going to look at the 94 points, but in the first half, with 12:23 left you only allowed them to score 4 points, defensively. What did you do defensively to shut them off?**

COACH HARDAWAY: We put a great game plan in. We knew who their weapons were and we took them out of the game. And man, the defense was as good as it's ever been. Everybody was locked in, everybody moving on a string, everybody was connected. What we did was we put a good plan and they stuck to the game plan the entire 20 minutes of the first half.

**Q. You play tomorrow 2:15. What's the message to your team?**

COACH HARDAWAY: Right now, we're thankful the game ended early and we can get home and get rest. We have to hydrate and get good meals. It's going to come quick. And you have to get bed tonight, get a good meal, get hydrated and get to bed.

**Q. Six days ago you guys lost in a heartbreaker at home. I know how much pride you take playing at FedExForum. Now you get a redemption shot against Houston. How locked are you guys just, you know, wanting to achieve something like that and take home the championship?**

COACH HARDAWAY: We're locked in because we have to be. You know, our disrespect nationally is why we're always locked in. We're building a culture. And the culture is toughness, the culture is trying to win championships. That's what they're all about and that's what we want to be all about. Locked in on winning tomorrow because we want to start hanging up banners. And you know, that's a team that you have to fight and nothing is ever going to be easy. And you have to earn everything. We're coming in tomorrow with the mindset of winning a championship.

**Q. You said most impressive performance of this season. Do you think that might have been the most impressive performance of your tenure here?**

COACH HARDAWAY: That's tough because at Tennessee was a good one. That performance -- I keep saying that -- but that was a tough place to play. And then

winning at Houston last year was tough. Any time you beat Houston, those are like, you know, those wins in your career. But this one, it wasn't as high as those because you had to win those games to try to solidify yourself in the country. Today's game was to advance, but you know this is in the top ten but not in the top two or three.

**Q. Coach, congratulations on the win. This is for KD and DeAndre. KD, you kind of mentioned it there just some of the disrespect that you all were getting from the last couple of teams, especially when it kinds gets pointed towards Penny Hardaway. For you and DeAndre, how much more personal do you guys take it when it seems like folks are coming at your head coach as opposed to maybe you guys?**

KENDRIC DAVIS: I take it personal at all. But, I mean, that's our leader. We just fight for him. We're going to go out swinging. And I felt like that one time we didn't swing hard enough. And any time they talk crazy, for me personally it locked me in, like, all right, let's go. I mean, I had it on my mind the whole time. We seen their tweets after they beat us, and we didn't want to let that happen again. We wanted to send a statement.

**Q. Coach, you spoke about the national disrespect that this team has taken, and maybe this conference has taken. Just what you want the nation to know about the Memphis Tigers at this point even before the championship game and about the level of competition you play in and out of conference?**

COACH HARDAWAY: Yeah, what I do want everybody to know is that we're a good ball team. We've earned that. Our nonconference, our conference. They don't give us the respect. To me we're more than a two-bid conference. It's just on a chute. You have to play against these teams everyday. Maybe their net isn't what it needs to be. But the teams we play against are very capable of beating us, just like Temple went to Houston. And then south Florida had a chance to beat Houston at home. All these teams are good. We lost to Tulane twice, lost at central Florida. We didn't have our entire team, but at the end of the day we battled. All the other conferences they get all this credit and lost 7, 8 games in a conference and still in the top 25, to me that's not giving us the respect that we deserve. We have to fight and continue to battle for that, and we're willing to do that.

**Q. Coach, you have compiled some very impressive rosters while being at Memphis. I know you look at each player as your own, just like your sons. What has KD and DeAndre mean to you on a personal level?**

COACH HARDAWAY: Yeah. They are like sons to me



because I know their stories. I know them inside out. I know it's bigger than basketball. When you know their stories and you know how hard they are fighting to try to feed their families, try to make it out of a situation and try to make to their dreams, I have been in their shoes. So our relationships are really strong because I can be on the level of a basketball player and still be their coach and understand from the adversity that they have gone through, I went through that same type of adversity. So that connected us from the very beginning with KD and with DeAndre. Both great guys that have gone through adversity like me that are looking to live a dream through basketball, and we're all connected together.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

