

American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Sunday, March 12, 2023

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

Memphis Tigers

Coach Penny Hardaway

Kendric Davis

DeAndre Williams

Alex Lomax

Postgame Press Conference

Memphis 75, Houston 65

PENNY HARDAWAY: I'm thanking God, first of all, for this opportunity and this moment. To have a great group of guys to come in here and no one know what we're going to do but us. To battle, fight, scratch all year long and to battle through injuries and adversity and to be here today with the same situation that we had last year and to get the win, I'm very proud, emotional in a great way on getting a championship and hanging a banner at the Laurie-Walton facility.

Q. All three of you guys, the semifinal and final game you get to play the two teams that swept you in the regular season. What's the feeling to get revenge on the biggest stage against those teams?

ALEX LOMAX: It's just something that we wanted. We didn't want it any other way. We wanted to play the guys and play against the toughest teams that handled us in the regular season. We had to come out and just show that we were much better and that we made a lot of adjustments coming into this one. So we wouldn't want it any other way. We most definitely wanted to play those two teams, and we made sure that we handled business, so listening to Coach.

KENDRIC DAVIS: Yeah, Coach coached us hard after the buzzer beater. He was on our necks. We just had to respond. Like all year, we lost a couple games like that, and we always responded. Just so happened we knew a team can't beat us three times in a row. That's a no-go. Coach made it clear we're the better team, and we showed



it.

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, to have the road that we had, the way we played against UCF, that was going to be a tough game. Tulane had this confidence over us because they beat us twice, and then Houston obviously beat us twice, buzzer beater at our place, we played a tough game there. To give us that road and to go through that road and win, it just shows how special this team is. We couldn't have asked for a better road. Barely winning against UCF at home, lose in a buzzer beater and get swept by Houston and get beat twice by Tulane and to have those same teams in this tournament, it was a tough road but it was definitely rewarding.

DEANDRE WILLIAMS: Yeah, those teams, man, they played their heart out. We're their championship game, so they came out there and got gutsy wins on us. But like Coach said, just to come back and go through that road again and get those wins is humongous for the city and for the fans, man. I'm real happy.

Q. You won a conference championship, first one in 10 years for Memphis. How do those emotions compare to some others?

PENNY HARDAWAY: The ones in high school are near and dear to my heart because those were for Desmond. I met that group at a very early age. The NIT championship was bittersweet because we wanted to make the NCAA Tournament and then we went to the NIT and took care of business. And this one is so rewarding because of the road that we've had to go through and the injuries and the guys that we lost. And everybody just counted us out when we lost the guy that we lost before the season started. And they didn't know which direction this team is going to go. And now we're here and we're champions, and it's very rewarding.

Q. Penny, you're talking about the road. Do you think at all about the totality of this, the five years, all the stuff that you've had to overcome, the stuff -- you talked about the NIT, there's the extracurricular stuff that you made it through. Do you think about that at all in a moment like this?

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PENNY HARDAWAY: Absolutely, you think about all the hard times that you had to go through just to fight and scratch. I came in right out of the gates saying that we were going to be NCAA champions. I wanted to be an NCAA champion. First you have to start with conference. I surpassed the conference part of it and was like, we're going to be national champions.

I hold myself to a high standard when it comes to coaching because there's a lot on my back, being from the city, and this thing coming full circle and being a player at the university. So I want to do really well, and when we're failing, it really bothers me, and right now I'm going to definitely have fun and enjoy this because I've learned to do that along the way.

Q. Kendrick, you talked about part of why you came here. You wanted to go to the NCAA Tournament. I know you guys probably had a good idea you were going to be there, but you are officially going to play in the NCAA Tournament. How does it feel?

KENDRIC DAVIS: It feels great. I want to be a part of what I seen Coach building. I had long nights questioning would I ever get there. Being at SMU was hard. You've got to go through Memphis and you've got to go through Houston, and I knew that. Man, I just wanted to be a part of what they was doing. I seen A-Lo and Dre, and they was dogs. And then I seen Coach Penny and I already knew his story and where he came from. I just wanted to be a part of that.

He told me, we're trying to win a championship just like you are, and we're sitting here today.

Q. Two questions for all the players and Coach Penny. Coach, do you think you guys feel disrespected having to sit and wait and find out that you were the 8 seed?

PENNY HARDAWAY: I wouldn't say disrespected. That's just the way Memphis has been treated, and we're fighting hard right now to make sure that we're one of the teams that they know about. And you've got to go win. The way that you combat that is you have to win. You have to go and you have to fight and you have to win, and you win, they give you the respect.

Yeah, we waited there, but we knew that we were in, we were champions. It was a much easier wait than last year. We missed it last year.

But we used it all as motivation. We felt like we were a top-25 team all year and we had some injuries and

obviously lost some games, but we liked us having that edge and that chip on our shoulders because this is how they've always treated us.

Q. For A-Lo and DeAndre, you guys have experienced this before, but KD, what was going through your mind?

KENDRIC DAVIS: Man, it finally happened. We didn't get it done in the regular season like we wanted to, so it was kind of set up for us to get it done here. We had lost to Tulane twice, lost to Houston. I remember Memphis beating Houston twice last year, and after they beat us, I was like, I don't know if they're going to get them three times. It was set up for us. We just got it done.

Q. (No microphone.)

ALEX LOMAX: I mean, that's what we came back for. This is my fifth year here. We experienced March Madness already, but there's a lot of unfinished business in the NCAA Tournament. Memphis has a lot of great history in March Madness, and the only goal was to get back and do something special when we get there.

It's very surreal to be back. That's the goal. We're not finished. But this is just all part of the plan. This is expected from us. This is the standard. It's just the Memphis way. It's always been a prestigious program with the basketball, so that's just the way, and just expectations. We've got a lot more to go. We're most definitely not satisfied.

Q. You talked about the road, Penny, and you look at the road that all these guys traveled. Does that make it sweeter or harder? What is it like having been through this five-year road and seeing the road these guys have traveled?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, when I look at these guys, I go basketball is hard. Our lives, all four of us up here, our lives have been very hard, and we persevered through everything. And that's what makes this even sweeter, because we're getting the rewards of our hard work that we've put in for so many years. But it's bigger than basketball, all these guys.

When I see us win, we're not just winning for basketball and winning for the school and the city. It is what we've had to endure growing up and then now to be able to celebrate, it feels good to be able to celebrate that.

Q. KD, at the end you went and got Penny because you wanted a picture with Penny and the trophy. Why was that important to you to get that?

KENDRIC DAVIS: You always go as your leader goes. Some days we still go in the gym like man, he's on us so hard. I used to always tell myself, I haven't won a championship so I really don't know what it makes. And I knew he knew, but I just was like -- I mean, we all can see it. Like man, Coach be on us hard, and he'll come in the locker room and we'll be like Coach is on 10 today.

Anytime we go through that -- me and Coach done had our head-to-heads. That's just part of the process. Man, it just reminded me of when he called me day one when I got in the partial and he told me this would happen, and it happened.

Q. What did you say to A-Lo when you got to -- what was the first thing you said to him?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, it was emotional because A-Lo lost his grandmother, we lost Des, we lost George, we lost two players that played with him in middle school that was with us along the way. We were doing this for all of them. We got emotional because we're used to winning championships. I told him, we've lost our winning ways by not taking care of business during games like this. We had plenty of opportunities in Orlando, we lost the last-second shot to Seton Hall. We're used to winning championships.

Then you come back and have Houston twice and don't take advantage of that, then at Alabama. We usually win those games, we just grit it out. To finally get back to our winning ways, it feels good.

ALEX LOMAX: We both was on the same page. Once it was that feeling again, felt like how it was back in the day when we won the state. We did it for our loved ones, like he said, for my grandma, for Coach Des, for my old teammates. Man, it just felt like everything we've been doing, we know they would be proud of us, and it's just a lot of emotions going on with that.

We're still doing it for them, but we know they're proud, and we know that they'll be right there with us along the way. So we're going to carry them right on our shoulders and make sure that we acknowledge it every time, everything we do, we're going to bring them with us and just keep acknowledging it.

Q. Penny, I think it was about a month ago when y'all lost to Tulane and there was talks about this team might not make the tournament at all, the NCAA Tournament. What did it take in that four or five-week span to turn that around into what we saw in this tournament, looking like one of the best teams in the country?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, that was a really bad loss for us at home. It was a great momentum win for them because they were right there with us, and that pushed them into second place. Now they're on us with a sweep.

It definitely was a bad loss, so what it took for us was to look in the mirror and say, hey, man, we're better than this. Even though we don't have our entire crew out here on the floor, the guys that are lacing up, we have to compete on every possession so we don't let this happen again. We just put our foot down.

Obviously we lost to the number one overall team two times in that span after that, but everybody else we took care of business and then got to this point. But yeah, that loss was tough, and it was looking like we were First Four out type of situation, and we knew we didn't want that. We didn't want to get back into that same scenario.

Q. You talk about the pressure of representing the city of Memphis. It seemed like at times this year the buzz was at a low. It seemed like with the loss to Tulane and other losses, people were checking out. Is there pressure when you see people kind of checking out?

PENNY HARDAWAY: No, because it's expected. It's been that way my whole entire life. Everybody is not going to like you, everybody is not going to agree. Everybody has an opinion and they have the right to their own opinions. I don't really buy into that. I really just push myself for greatness every single day, and that's why I put so much pressure on myself to try to win championships.

Q. Coach, it's been 10 years since the university has had this type of buzz around it. How soon do you start preparing for FAU?

PENNY HARDAWAY: I'm going to enjoy this today, but I'll start preparing for FAU today, as well. But I'm going to enjoy this. I am. I know that sounds weird, but I'm going to enjoy this with the guys because it's hard to win on this level, and championships are meant to be celebrated, and we're going to celebrate this.

Q. KD, after that final horn sounded, it took you a minute to get back. Walk us through the emotion of that, finally hearing the buzzer sound and your emotions.

KENDRIC DAVIS: I think I said, man, just it's hard. It's hard to win at this level for real. It's hard.

The previous two, three years, I keep saying it, man, I had to go through A-Lo and Coach, and that ain't easy. It ain't.



We was almost there last year, but they got us, and then we had to watch them get in the tournament. And then the year before last, we was in the NIT with them and they won it. It's like, man, will it ever happen for me?

I came back to college to see could it happen for me, and I wanted to come somewhere where winning is normal. I joined these dudes, man, and they're all warriors. A-Lo probably 75 percent, and he go out there today and have a big game, and that's what Memphis is about. We don't lay down to nobody, and he showed it.

Q. During the tournament you said you focused on one game at a time. Did you get a chance to enjoy this ride right here? Are you going to take this one day and enjoy it or are you still focused on that one step, one step, one step?

DEANDRE WILLIAMS: I'm going to definitely take time to enjoy this. We know when the NCAA Tournament comes around we're going to have to lock back in on one day at a time, but this is an amazing experience with my brothers, with my coach, and I'm going to enjoy it today for sure.

Q. For everybody, what do you know about FAU?

ALEX LOMAX: I've seen them play in the conference championship, a couple games in the conference the last couple days. They're a good team. They play hard. They're 30-3, they've been winning games, so they got accustomed to winning this year, and they know their roles there. So it's going to be a good fun matchup, but that's a good program that's been winning a lot of games. They have 30 wins. I don't know how many teams in the country have that.

Most definitely going to be prepared, but I know a little bit about them; they're winners this season.

DEANDRE WILLIAMS: For me, I'm going to be honest, I don't know anything about them, but I know about the NCAA Tournament, and anybody can be beat. After we enjoy today and a win in the championship, we're going to get back to the drawing board and watch film and see how they work.

KENDRIC DAVIS: I don't know too much about them. I know they was ranked at the beginning of the year, and anytime you're ranked, you're good. They only lost three games this year, and they won 30. They're a good team.

We've just got to be ready because I know that we'll --

PENNY HARDAWAY: For me I haven't watched them much. I just know anytime you win 30 games, you have to

win non-conference and then they've dominated conference. I saw them beat UAB. UAB is a really good team. So they beat some good teams pretty badly all year. So we know that they're going to be for real, and once we get to watch film, we'll come up with a game plan and be ready for them.

Q. A-Lo, that massive steal when Houston was making their push and your celebration, I'll call it, afterwards, what was going through your mind at that point, both the steal and the celebration?

ALEX LOMAX: I mean, in that moment it was just an out-of-body experience. I was just feeling free. You want to know what I said, I said, "I've got big nuts," and I held them because it's true. It might not have been professional in the moment, but it's just something that I had to let out.

I've got a lot of emotions that I don't let out, so that was just one in that moment, so hopefully in March Madness there's a part 2 to that.

Q. Obviously you guys win this game this year that you didn't last year. Two years in a row you guys are going into the tournament playing really good basketball, probably the best you have the entire year. How much different does this year feel compared to last?

PENNY HARDAWAY: Man, it's 180, to be very honest with you, because we didn't know where we were going to be seeded. We were fighting really hard. We knew we had to beat SMU or else they were going to be in, so it was a grueling tournament.

And then to have Houston for the third time and lose in the championship, we were in the locker room just in a daze. We missed the Selection Sunday to see where we were going to go, and then we find out we're going three time zones northwest to go play Boise State, which was a really good team, and then have the next game be the No. 1 overall seed.

So this year, it was definitely more gratifying. It was better -- we waited a very long time, but the wait was worth it because we were champions today. And to have this game again, I just thank God for the opportunity to be able to play Houston again in this championship game and be able to turn it around in our favor.

Q. For all four of you, when you look to the right and you see that trophy sitting there and you hear the sentence, University of Memphis, American Athletic Champions, what does that mean?



ALEX LOMAX: Man, that means the world to us. There's just a standard. That's the goal. That's something that we've been talking about since day one, especially since Kendrick and DeAndre came and we knew we were going to be playing together. Coach always had the master plan for us, so this is something that we truly wanted, something that hasn't been done in 10 years. So it's just a very surreal moment and something that's going to live on through Memphis history forever.

DEANDRE WILLIAMS: Basically to piggy-back off what he just said, the journey was amazing. Just to see that trophy right there is surreal, and with these guys right here, man, I couldn't have dreamt of nothing better but just to think back on all the hard work and practice and off-season, everything. It's amazing, man. I just thank the man above for giving us this opportunity.

KENDRIC DAVIS: Yeah, like this is the reason why I came here. We don't settle for -- we was mad getting second place. Anytime you play for a coach who's used to hanging banners, who's a Hall of Famer, excellence is the standard. We wanted to leave here with something we can come back 20 years down the line and say, we did that. Coach always said it, championships kills everything. I know I'll be able to show my kid this, and it's something I'll be able to see when I come back and visit the university.

PENNY HARDAWAY: For me, it's just the hard work that we put in for five years, aiming for championships, and now we have one.

Q. Coach, kind of going off of what you just said, dreams realized, coming here a few years ago, returning back to a place to call home, and just what it is for you to have dreams realized. And then to the student-athletes what your favorite part about having Penny as your leader is.

PENNY HARDAWAY: Yeah, for me, it's all about dreaming. But I've had the reality of getting championship trophies, so I've been there before, and I knew with the right guys, like the guys up here and the guys in that locker room, that we could put a culture together, something special to win championships, and now we're a champion. No one can take that away from us.

ALEX LOMAX: It's just a small part of a dream coming true. Obviously it's a dream to get to the tournament, but it was a dream to get to the conference tournament first. There's steps to it, and that's the first part, and we handled it. So we're very happy, but we're still dreaming. We've got something else to do.

DEANDRE WILLIAMS: Yeah, man, when your dreams

come true, that's amazing. Like I said earlier, I just thank the man above for putting us in this situation to be able to bring a championship back to the city. We worked so hard to do this, and to actually see it happen, it's amazing. I'm so happy for us and the city.

KENDRIC DAVIS: Yeah, start with the city. We had a rough time with Tyre. Everybody knows that situation. Just sometimes the city gets a bad spotlight, so Coach always tells us, we're the city's hope. We were able to say we did it for the city. Memphis is like a second home to me. It's really -- man, they've embraced me since day one. Most importantly, man, I'm glad to make the city happy.

Coach and I always talk about the city happy, making the city happy, playing hard for the city. Can't too many teams say they get to play for a city. You play for a university, but we play for a city, and I'm happy to say that they can remember this.

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