

National Invitation Tournament: Chattanooga vs Loyola Chicago

Wednesday, April 2, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinkle Fieldhouse

Chattanooga Mocs

Dan Earl

Trey Bonham

Honor Huff

Semifinal Postgame Press Conference

Chattanooga 80, Loyola 73

DAN EARL: Not to sound like too much of a cliché but everybody says this, but super proud of our guys. Another hard-fought win, competitive game, both teams going at it.

Credit to Loyola Chicago. They are a very good team. Obviously their bigs were giving us fits, and they have a variety of different guys on the perimeter that can score the ball.

We got stops when we needed to down the stretch, and just played with tremendous toughness, I thought, throughout. The fact that we took care of the ball, 22 assists, eight turnovers, is kind of who we are on the offensive end, and these two guys, again, were phenomenal.

Total team win. Proud of the guys. Let's see if we can get one more.

Q. Honor, this was pretty similar to the MTSU game in that you were kind of quiet, and every point that you had, it was an incredibly important play. What is your mindset going late down the stretch like that?

HONOR HUFF: It's funny because last year we joked about I needed to get the ball more when the game is on the line or it's crunch time. I think I kind of flushed the rest of the game now when it's time to gut-check it and win.

I think last year, if I was having a bad game, it just took over the whole game, and Coach used to get on me for that. Nowadays it's just like we want to win, and I want to win for my teammates. So I'm going to make the big play down the stretch and I kind of flush everything else that



happen. And if I miss a lot of shots, or I make them, it's crunch time.

And I think my teammates have full belief in me to make it happen. I think Trey looked for me this time, and you know, the rest is history now.

Q. How much did you all kind of need Trey's aggressiveness in the first half of the game? I think he had 13 of the first 27, and then kind of let you all like settle into the game a little bit.

HONOR HUFF: We need that all the time. I wish he do it more often. Because usually he comes out in the second half is and starts to assert his dominance in the game like he did Bradley.

For him to set that tone for us early and set that aggression and keep it. Because obviously none of us were having as good of a game as he was to start. For him to keep it even-keel throughout the first half gave us momentum going into the second half because we are a second half team. As long as he's cooking, the rest of us know we're going to pick it up for him in the second half. I think that's what we did.

Q. Late in the game, dying seconds, you have the ball in your hands, and it's win-or-go-home. What's going through your head as you shoot that three-ball?

HONOR HUFF: What would Kyrie Irving do. Right wing. Golden State Warriors 2016, sidestep to the right, bucket.

Just don't want to let my teammates do you know. Realistically, if we would have lost, I would have held it a lot on my back and the burden on me because of the game I had shooting the ball. So I just knew I wanted to close it out, and just like MTSU, I felt like that was the time to do it. I had the switch with the big, and I guess they didn't learn that you have to step up a little closer, and like I said, the rest is history.

Q. With that made three, you now lead Division I in

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successful three-pointer season. How does that make you feel?

HONOR HUFF: Elated. I'm not going to lie. I'm not going to show it too much. But it's not me; it's my teammates. It's him. It's everybody. Garrison Keeslar, five assists, and I think two of those is to me. So just my teammates having belief in me and my coaches throughout the whole season, and believing in my jumpshot and my three-pointer. And obviously the work I put in my whole life shooting the ball. So I mean, it's a great feeling but again I couldn't get here without my teammates.

Q. Talk about just the adjustments you made defensively, and also the play you got from your bigs.

DAN EARL: Defensively we were switching up man and zone quite a bit. But our zone, we were playing some zone and then flipping into man mid-possession.

So just asking the guys to always be guarding a guy. You know, Loyola did a good job of attacking us. Their bigs kind of had their way offensively against us but I thought our bigs held their own overall. We held them to only five offensive rebounds, which was a big thing because we're not the biggest most physical team.

So I thought our bigs did a good job. Collin hit a huge three late. But the guards, too. These two guys, obviously honor had that ball late. Huge shot. And as Honor pointed out, Trey was awesome in the first half.

You know when teams, they try to get into us sometimes, and when they do, you need somebody to get the ball downhill into the paint.

I thought Trey was phenomenal, particularly in the first half, with getting into the lane and getting some layups, and as someone alluded to, you know, getting pressure off us. So I thought that was huge.

Q. Trey, you played for the win tonight and you advance to the final on Thursday, but regardless of the win or lose, that game will be the last time you ever wear a UTC jersey. How does that make you feel?

TREY BONHAM: That will be the last time I wear a UTC? Jersey? Oh, I thought he said the last game.

Oh, yeah, I mean, I've loved every minute here at Chatt these last two years. I'm glad Honor was being annoying, blowing up when I was in the portal, and the trust I've had in Coach Earl, he's had trust in me from the jump, recruiting me when nobody else did.

So I've loved every minute of it, and it's going to hurt but I'm happy for all the memories.

Q. Do you ever get tired of Groundhog Day, falling behind early and coming back?

TREY BONHAM: Nah, I mean I'm kind of used to it now. I told at halftime, I was like, The game is too close. They messed up. We're a second half team. I knew if we're not down 20 at halftime, then I feel like we're going to win. I'm used to it.

Q. Are you comfortable with the team approach that we're going to get down 20 in the first half and figure out how to win?

DAN EARL: Absolutely not. Thank you for bringing that up.

So I do -- the fact that our guys have confidence that we're not out of it because we've been in a lot of those games. We're down pretty big and/or down a little bit. And the guys know that we can rally and we've been there and they don't lose composure which is awesome.

But I would much prefer to come out of the gates with a lead, and make it easier on ourselves. We'll see what happens next game, and I'm rolling with these guys regardless.

THE MODERATOR: Would you guys talk a little bit about what it means to be playing for a trophy on Thursday night. Go ahead.

HONOR HUFF: I told the sideline reporter after the game, obviously a lot of y'all saw the video after we lost in the conference tournament how I felt not being able to get it done for my brother right here and for my teammates.

So to be able to play for something just as big, I guess, in the NIT is a big thing for us. We want to win. We don't want the season to end on a bad note. We already felt that pain and agony from the conference tournament. So our mindset is going win, and like I said, I don't want to let my teammate down, him down again. That hurt me too much. We're coming to play on Thursday.

TREY BONHAM: Yes, it's a great experience. I'm thankful for the NIT. I was talking to somebody, I was like, I've never played in a championship game in my life, so I know -- it's kind of crazy, right. Yeah, it's a blessing. Hopefully I can get it done. I'm like Jordan. I'm going to go undefeated in championships.

Q. You've had big wins, fought through adversity,



tough losses, but you have one more game with this core group. What does that mean to you and how are you going to make that count?

DAN EARL: Again, I know everybody speaks highly of their team after they win. But if you're around and some of the reporters in here are around our guys quite a bit, it is an awesome, awesome group. High-character guys. Listen, coachable, mature, just fun to be around.

And you pointed out, everybody's got a journey, right. Nobody goes all 31 games for 30-plus games and never has an injury or whatever. But we've had our fair share. We started off the season with a bunch of guys injured. Slow start. Obviously had a huge injury to Frank Champion in the Southern Conference Tournament or right before it, and the guys have battled through.

Other guys have stepped up, some of our backup centers. And the guys have just continued to play hard, be coachable, and then they have enjoyed it, as well, which is really cool to see.

Q. It's been a long journey with the two gentlemen who just walked out of this room for you. The three of you guys have been through a lot. As you prepare for what comes the next couple days, what do you think, particularly, about this core group that was just here?

DAN EARL: Yeah, both phenomenal young men. I mean, we started together at VMI. They both went to VMI which is a great institution. It's hard to go to school there. And they battled through there. They have offensive end memories, and we joke about some of the things that they had to endure.

I think it's pretty cool. I think it says a lot about our program, about our assistant coaches, about the other guys, we had another young man, Jake Stephens, who followed us to Chatt as well. But the fact that -- and they took different paths and followed us to Chatt.

Hopefully it shows they believe in what we're doing. Great guys. And look, you think back to things like, you know, I've been hard on both those guys. Trey in particular. He's got a lot to his game, and at times I'm holding back the reins a little bit or whatever, and that can be frustrating. He's handled it well. Honor, as well. They have remained coachable.

Great young men. I'll miss them. Hopefully we'll have Honor back near year, but Trey's eligibility is up. But we're going to give it our all on the Championship Game on, whatever, Thursday.

Q. Obviously you get behind in the first half and one of the things, it seemed like from our perspective, was that defensively, y'all were able to make some stops, and it was like Jack getting hands on balls and Garrison Keeslar had a steal. How important was that? Nobody really talks about choose defense. What about that part of the game with those particular guys making plays?

DAN EARL: Awesome. You know, everybody points out our offense. Our offense has been pretty efficient all year long.

When we're at our best, our defense, we're look in and we're getting stops and at different points, you can draw a curve of how we've done this year, and we just have to compete all the time. I think flipping up defenses helped. As you mentioned, Jack Kostel got his hand on a couple basketballs. Some other guys, as well. So that helped. And then the guys are just playing hard and battling.

When we can be a good defensive team, and look, Loyola missed some shots, too, especially late. They got free on a couple open baskets, and they missed shots that they might normally make. But we'll take a little of that.

But I thought it was a hard-fought game, and I thought we competed and battled throughout defensively, and that's, again, when we're at our best and gives us the best chance to win.

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