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AN INTERVIEW WITH:

AUBURN

THE MODERATOR: We'll continue on with Auburn. We'll ask Coach Pearl for some opening comments and then take questions for the student-athletes.

COACH PEARL: I've been talking about how proud I am of my team, despite the fact that we lost a lot of games down the stretch, because I didn't feel like they had quit. I felt like they continued to come to practice, continued to listen to game plans, and continued to try to believe in themselves and me and what we're trying to do. I just think you could see not necessarily evidence of the result, but evidence of the effort.

Second thing is, we also have said many times this year that we play best when everybody contributes. That this is for whatever reason, in my system, I like to play nine or 10 guys. I like to spread the scoring around and share the sugar a little bit.

There's been some times when KT has had to carry us or Antoine has had to force the issue or we have had to pound it down into Mason too much. And you could see tonight the difference between K.C. Ross-Miller stepping up as a senior and having a memorable game.

We beat Georgia at Georgia earlier in the year and people want to know why. It was because K.C. won his matchup against a really fine player. J.J. Frazier. And tonight, Ready is a terrific player and I told the team, I said, If he outplays K.C., Mississippi State's going to win. Well, K.C. had to really play well to not be out played by Ready, Ready played terrific.

And Alex, you know, he told me before the game that he felt good. He felt good before the

game, and obviously this is a huge step-up game for him.

I would say more than anything our players continued to keep their confidence in Alex when perhaps Alex or even the coaching staff lost some confidence in him, because he's not been able to play as well as he's capable of.

But his teammates kept him going. And to that there's a lot to be said for that. We would not have been able to advance without their effort.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Take your questions for the student-athletes, please.

Q. K.C., talk about wanting to get the ball. Did you want to get the ball late at the foul line when the game was on the line?

K.C. ROSS-MILLER: Yes, that was something I was looking for as a point guard and just being able to go get the ball and just knock down my free throws, so...

COACH PEARL: You can do better than that. You could do a lot better than that.

K.C. ROSS-MILLER: I thought that was a good answer.

COACH PEARL: I thought it was an okay answer.

(Laughter.)

Q. Alex, could you just talk about what were you feeling tonight and who put the Z in your head?

ALEX THOMPSON: Well going into the game during warm ups and yesterday's shoot around my shot felt really good and I told coach that before the game. So I guess I was a lot more confident in my shot today, and being a little more aggressive knowing it was a close game and someone else needed to step up.

About the Z, it was just a random I felt like flaring it up. I can't really give you a solid reason for that.

Q. The lightning bolt from The Natural?

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ALEX THOMPSON: We can go with that.

Q. That would be a good story.

ALEX THOMPSON: All right.

Q. KT, it sound like from talking to your teammates the coaches talked a lot about the fact that you guys hadn't won a game in this tournament since 2009. How much did that motivate especially you as a senior?

KT HARRELL: It meant a lot. Especially being a senior. Trying to lay this foundation here, Coach Pearl is going to turn this program around and just be a part of history. It means a lot. But we're not satisfied, we want to keep going and stay here a little bit longer. So we going to prepare a little bit tonight and be ready to play tomorrow.

Q. For the players, first win in a while. When it's been a couple weeks to get a win, how good does it feel? Forget about it being the tournament, but just simply to get a win at this point after I think six straight?

ALEX THOMPSON: It feels really good because we thought we had been playing really well defensively lately and playing really hard. It just feels good to get over the hump of actually finishing off the game and winning it. Because we have been playing solid basketball lately and so it felt great.

KT HARRELL: It feels amazing. You lose a lot of close games, a lot of tough ones, and when you finally get to pull it out, especially here in the tournament, it's an amazing feeling. Coach told us to celebrate it for a little while, but be ready to play tomorrow. So we will.

K.C. ROSS-MILLER: It feels good to win. It's really a big confidence booster for us. I think that we should just carry it and watch how we won and we did a good job communicating on defense and playing together. So I think it's just a confidence booster more than anything.

Q. KT, talk about Devin Waddell's performance tonight.

KT HARRELL: I mean, we don't win without Devin. He took two huge charges, he was just being really active defensively. Without the level of his play tonight, we don't win that game.

So I'm just proud of him and proud of Alex and we have so many guys step up. So we're just going to try to do the same thing tomorrow and make sure everybody contributes.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll excuse the student-athletes and take questions for coach.

Q. Couple minutes left, there's an offensive rebound on your end and Devin just lays out to keep it alive and the play finishes with Alex hitting a three to give you a four-point lead. How huge was that?

COACH PEARL: It was huge and TJ's offensive rebounds there late to gain those possessions. It's just guys that you're not expecting to make those plays.

Look, you guys have covered sports forever. How often in tournament play is it somebody that you just aren't expecting? Well, tonight it was about four guys you weren't expecting from us. K.C., Alex, Devin, TJ Lang. I mean, TJ, my guess is that Sword wasn't a hundred percent. He looked like he was a little nicked up. He still had 21.

But we're putting TJ Lang on the opposing team's best offensive player. As a freshman he couldn't come in and guard a walk-on and he's really improved defensively. So it's great for the team, it's great moral builder.

Walk-ons have got a very special place in my heart. Let's face it, obviously we went with that lineup there late. We went with that lineup because it was a lineup that was defending and rebounding and we had a bunch of starters on the bench, but just felt like those guys were playing well.

Q. Could you talk about the rebounding. You guys had a nice edge in the regular season game. It was pretty ugly.

COACH PEARL: Again, the fact that they only got five offensive rebounds and we got 24 defensive rebounds says a lot. We were physical, we blocked out, and I do think that having -- there's a lot of things you can't explain.

K.C. had seven defensive rebounds. I really don't think you can make enough about his play. So, you know, the question is, could I have gotten more of that out of him more often if he's capable of playing that well? The answer might be yeah. K.C. was a guy that I would say was capable of what you saw tonight.

Alex, he hadn't shown that until in a big moment.

So it was a good team effort. I told the

team before the game, I said, Which team was going to want it more, which team's going to want it more for their own teammates and which team's going to want it for their family and their university?

And we talked a lot about the fact that it's been years since Auburn has come to the SEC tournament and won a basketball game. And we're still here. That's a step in the right direction.

Q. You don't have a whole lot of time to celebrate. You got to come back here in less than 24 hours to play Texas A&M. Talk about what kind of a challenge that brings?

COACH PEARL: Texas A&M didn't beat us. They dominated us. 10 points at home and 25 on road. They dominated us. And we just, it was all we could do to hang in there with them.

So they're very big, very physical, they're very deep. Their man-to-man stuff's hard it guard. Without House they don't shoot it as well from three. Alabama beat them last game playing about 30 minutes of zone. We haven't played 30 minutes of zone all year.

So we got to figure out a way to hold them under 80, which is what they got last time. In fact I'm not even sure the last couple of times, it's been pretty tough to guard them.

Q. With Bowers, was that coach's decision in the second half? He only played like seven minutes.

COACH PEARL: Yeah, Cinm's been carrying us. I mean, he really has. Believe it or not, he's terrifically coachable. But Devin was playing well defensively, and I didn't feel like that's what we needed.

And then the other thing was, offensively, I felt like we were going to go through our guards, so Devin's not going to do much offensively other than just keep a 50/50 ball alive, set a really good screen. So offensively I was going to go with my guards and defensively, Devin's been rock solid all year long. It's an area that Cinmeon to improve in.

Q. You said you talked a lot about the fact that Auburn hasn't won a game in this tournament in years. One of the players said you mentioned it even at halftime tonight. Why was that a point of emphasis for you? Why was that a motivational tool that you used?

COACH PEARL: When you receive more support than you deserve, I go to bed every single night really wanting to show more progress for

Auburn basketball this year on court. Just not been able to do it. So it bothers me.

So like I said, this game was not for the team. This game was for our fans. This game was for the former players at Auburn that just probably figured we're struggling down the stretch and this season's probably over. But I told them, they have not quit. And so this game was for our lettermen and our former players. This game was not for our players or coaches. This is for everybody that's supported us.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you very much.

COACH PEARL: Thank you.

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