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AN INTERVIEW WITH:

AUBURN

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

COACH PEARL: Well, we had a pretty emotional visit in the locker room after the game. Just really proud of my kids. Just God's blessed us. He kept us together through really difficult times and through adversity and losing. We never broke up. We never quit.

You don't always get rewarded for doing that. Sometimes you don't give up and you keep playing hard and you don't win, but in this case we have been blessed.

So, then just from a basketball standpoint, I just think that defensively we have really bought in. I mean, we guarded so hard, so well, so smart. Chuck Person is my defensive coordinator and he just continues to help us improve on the defensive end.

I think just the last thing would be this, and it's just reminiscent of my days at Tennessee, all things were equal out there except we had Number 5 and you didn't. And that was Chris Lofton.

And in this tournament, all things are equal out there, except we got Number 1, KT Harrell, and you don't. And that's been the thing.

It's been somebody else on different nights, but it's been KT every night.

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

Q. KT, just talk about the shot at the end of regulation. Were you kind of thinking they might try to foul somebody so that you couldn't get off a three? And then your

thoughts as it was arcing high in the air and went in.

KT HARRELL: I knew coach was going to draw up a play for me to get the three ball. I really didn't think about them fouling. That probably would have been the smarter move.

But I got a clean look and knocked it down. My teammates just believed in me. I told them I was going to knock it down and I was able to get a clean look thanks to Cinm screening my man a little bit and dropping it off to me. So, just that gave us a lot of momentum going into over time.

Q. For KT, you kind of picked things up there in the final 2:35 of regulation. Did you make any conscious decision and just decide to try to get as many points as you could there?

KT HARRELL: No, it's never about trying to get points, really. It's just trying to be aggressive and make plays, whether it's for me or my teammates. My teammates always are looking for me and they did a good job of trying to find me and get me open. We all did a great job tonight.

Q. For KT, what impact did Granger's ejection have on this team?

KT HARRELL: I think it turned us up a little bit defensively. He's one of our best defensive players, if not the best defensive player we have. To see him go out, we knew we had to pick it up defensively for him not having him out there. So I think we did a much better job defensively and talking and communicating when he left the game.

Q. Malcolm, how were you able to get to the basket in the first half and make some easy shots?

MALCOLM CANADA: My team just set screens for me and coach always tells me to stay on attack and be aggressive. Driving in and look for others. And the lanes was open and I just took

what the defense gave me. They gave me some easy looks and I just took them with confidence and knocked them down.

Q. For maybe Malcolm and KT, how does it feel to win? It's now three wins in three days after kind of a tough conference season and you're playing now on Saturday in the semi-finals.

MALCOLM CANADA: It feels great. We had a tough season, but at the same time, we knew the games we lost we could have won. We put ourselves in position to win a lot of them games.

Lately, coach, our coaches have been putting a big emphasis on defense, defense, defense, defense, staying together, defense, staying together. Offense is going to be there.

And lately, that's all we have been doing is just staying together and playing defense and just having fun. When you have fun and you play the game of basketball, good things happen, no matter what. That's what we have been doing lately is just having fun and it feels good to win now.

KT HARRELL: It feels great, just like Malcolm said. Nobody expected us to be here. I'm pretty sure you guys didn't expect us to be here, that's for sure.

But we stayed together and we knew how good we are, even though our record didn't show it. We just knew we had to pick it up defensively. That's what the problem was all season.

And we're just proud of everybody and staying together and staying focused on what we have to do to try to win games and we're just happy to be moving on.

ANTOINE MASON: We just taking advantage of our opportunities. Like KT said, we're a better team than we were in the season, but we just we're showing it now. It starts off with the defensive end. Everybody's making a commitment on defense to stop their man and help each other out and it's working in our favor.

Q. For Antoine and KT and Malcolm, you guys all know the next time you lose is the last time you're going to play in that uniform. What does that mean to have one more game to play, and especially for you, Antoine, to come back to play with these guys this week?

ANTOINE MASON: Take advantage of our opportunities, like I said. This is our last. Like you said, this is our last games every day. So we take advantage of it. We want to put our best foot

forward and we live to fight another day. That's our mentality every time we step on the court.

KT HARRELL: It means a lot, man. We're just going to leave it all out there. We know we're playing against the best team in the country. Nobody's going to have us picked to win the game, just like every game we play. So we're just going to leave it all out there.

I guarantee you that nobody's not going to come out there ready to play. Everybody is going to be out there ready to play and giving it all they got. So we're just excited and we'll be ready to play tomorrow.

MALCOLM CANADA: Just one day at a time. One day at a time. It feels good to play for Auburn, and the way we're going out right now, we're giving it back to Auburn. That's all that matters. We love it.

And when we do end up being our last game, we're going to all lay down these jerseys for the fans and let them know that we appreciate it and we love y'all and thank y'all for all the support. One day at a time.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse you to the locker room and take questions for coach.

Q. Like you said, We have KT and you don't. Kentucky has quite a few answers. What now in a game where they will have some guys that can maybe matchup?

COACH PEARL: Well, I had said during the course of the season, I told my team, I said, We can beat any team in the league except Kentucky. And the reason why I said that was because I truly wanted them to believe that we could beat Ole Miss or LSU or Arkansas or Georgia. Because to just say we could beat any team in the league, I don't know that that would be a hundred percent.

So we have this opportunity now to go play against the most storied program in the history of college basketball, the best team in the country, and in the semi-finals of the SEC tournament. We will try to represent.

We're going to be short-handed. We're already the smallest team in the league, and probably the smallest team in of all the high major conferences going up against the biggest team maybe in the history of Division I basketball.

So it's a tough matchup for the Tigers.

Q. You guys will be playing your fourth game and in four days against probably the deepest team in the country, too. How do you dig deeper into that well to get by in this one?

COACH PEARL: Well, we'll try to go back and just kind of keep the same routine. Everything we could do to keep the kids off their feet tonight. The trainers, strength coaches, they will be working to keep them hydrated and stretched. And having been in this situation before, typically the third game is when you notice it, and we didn't notice it tonight. I did not notice fatigue.

So, yeah, Kentucky's depth is going to be an issue. Because LSU, they don't play. They're not real deep. Really, really talented front line and a really talented five or six, and so fatigue wasn't a disadvantage for us tonight.

Q. Not for your players, but for you, you were away from this thing for three years and now it seems like nobody can make you go home.

COACH PEARL: Well, I think that Bridgestone has been good to me, better than I deserve. The things that jump out at me would be it really was important when we played Marquette in here and it was a Big East SEC matchup. The Big East is the Big East, and we got that one.

When we played Oklahoma State out of the Big-12 and they were ranked nationally, and I think it was Dane Bradshaw that I think he made the shot, didn't he, to win that game. And that was a SEC Big-12 matchup. So there have been a lot of non-conference big wins in this building for us.

Now, just trying to get Auburn relevant, for us to be a factor. The way our kids play hard, the way they don't quit, and the way they believe in each other, they're making some history.

Q. The all-conference first team had nine players on it. KT Harrell was not one of them. Is the way he's playing in this tournament an indication that that was an injustice?

COACH PEARL: You know, I wouldn't call it an injustice, because to do that would be a disservice to any of the nine that made it. I mean that with all sincerity. You look at everyone of them and I would say everyone of them was deserving to be on it.

But KT was as well. I would have a hard time finding a more consistent player in the league than KT. I know Kentucky's going to do everything they can to take him away. All that stuff we do for

KT, all that down-screen dribble hand off rescreen, they will just switch it all out there and it will be one 6'10" guy after another just trying to smother him.

But KT is certainly -- he led the league in scoring and I can promise you, KT taking Auburn to the semi-finals of the SEC tournament means more to him than being first- or second-team All-SEC. I believe that to be true.

Q. Can you talk about playing five guards a lot of the second half and I count Devin as a guard, even though he's playing forward?

COACH PEARL: Yeah, we were pretty much 6'2" across, 6'3" across the front line there. It didn't hurt us too much defensively. Mickey was out and our post defense, our guys did a terrific job. Devin Waddell and Cinm, I don't know, Bowers did a great job on Mickey, fronting him. And then when he did get it, we obviously double-teamed him and they kicked it out and they knocked down seven threes.

But we weren't going to let -- we just couldn't let those guys just load it up and big-boy us at the rim. So the post defense was really terrific.

Q. What was your message to the team in the final minutes of this game? LSU had that late lead. What were you telling them as they started to cut in on that lead?

COACH PEARL: I just felt like we were in great shape. I just felt -- I tried to keep it light and lively on the bench in those situation, because I didn't want those guys to panic or get nervous. I just felt good about it.

So, you know, we were able to do a lot of switching, because we were so small and we kind of were able to build a wall a little bit and keep those guys on the perimeter. Then offensively, we were just smart enough to get the ball to KT, and just continued to get him looks. I'm not sure down in regulation, I think he scored almost all of our points down in regulation.

So the team was smart enough to find him and he was good enough to finish the job.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

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