

# Maui Jim Maui Invitational

Wednesday, November 23, 2016

## Rick Barnes

## Robert Hubbs

Tennessee Volunteers

Tennessee - 95, Chaminade - 81

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from coach.

COACH BARNES: I'm really proud of our guys. Everyone knows we're a young team. Today I think we ended up starting three freshmen. But to play three early games in three days, I thought the focus was obviously the two games prior to this was we really played hard, played our hearts out. And we're playing this game, the last game of the tournament, first game of the last day it gets down to mental toughness, focus.

And I thought our guys really had great respect for Chaminade and played really hard. They present problems for you with the way they spread and shoot the three ball. But I thought we did a really good job in the closing minutes of the game. They went zone probably to protect some players, and when they do that, teams do that, we feel like we have a great weapon in Robert Hubbs that can do a lot of things around the rim, and he played terrific today and really almost single-handedly himself took the zone apart for us.

**Q. It didn't seem like you were forcing as much in the second half. Is that as much in rhythm you've been in a while?**

ROBERT HUBBS: Yeah, I just felt comfortable out there playing. The coaches and coaching staff put me in great position to lead my team to victory. I found open gaps and tried to make some plays.

**Q. What do you think leaving here, this team, how much progress did they make over the last three days? You're a senior, you've been around, you've been through stuff like this. How much better off are you having been here?**

ROBERT HUBBS: I think our progress has been very good. We had two close battles in Wisconsin and Oregon, two really great teams, and we put up a fight and it just shows how good this team can be. The coaching staff down to the training staff. We are all in this together, and we just try to put the pieces together and just try to come out with some wins.



**Q. How would you describe kind of what Coach was talking about as far as on the last day of the tournament, playing in the first game against Chaminade, a D 2 team, just your approach today?**

ROBERT HUBBS: Just coming out, approaching it like any other game. We can't take anybody for granted. Just come out and play Tennessee basketball. The coaching staff provided us with a great scouting report last night and this morning. And we executed on that and came out and played the way we normally play.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

**Q. I'm sure you know you were going to get this question, but how do you feel being the first coach to win with three different teams here at the Maui Invitational?**

COACH BARNES: I love coaching this game. And I was saying yesterday I think this tournament, it's amazing how you're made to feel when you come here. It's so different than it was back -- again, I can't remember the first time I came.

But I think I even came one time as an assistant. But I can't remember. Every team is different. Every team but one that I've brought here has been a very young team, and two of the three young teams that we brought here, we lost this game.

And it ended up being I think up until last year the only two losing teams I'd coached. And so thinking about this game and this group of guys, I can't tell you how proud I am of the way they came out today and responded, because they really laid it out there for two days against two really top 20 teams.

But I think we'll leave here knowing that we're capable of playing and beating anybody on our schedule. And we're not taking this win lightly, because we talked about everybody, the message to our team today was people will say Chaminade has nothing to lose, and that's not true because they've got a terrific coach, a terrific group of players, and they want to win.

And so we told our guys they've got just as much to lose as we do and you can expect to fight. And I thought for again a young group of guys, they came out and had great respect for the opponent and worked hard and it really is a good win for us.

**Q. Is that the kind of performance you draw up for Robert Hubbs in terms of what you guys are trying to sell to him, that he doesn't have to force a bunch of stuff to score a lot of points?**

COACH BARNES: Yeah, and he has I think pressed a little bit. I think the only forced -- he took -- we took a couple of 3s that we shouldn't have taken. But Robert, he's comfortable around the basket. He can shoot the ball. I think when he really works hard at using his athletic ability, I think he's a very tough guy to defend. And he hasn't played great this year. But I think today he looks like the Robert Hubbs we thought he would be.

I just talked to Wade Kerry [phonetic] himself. I thought he was focused. I thought he was talking. I thought he was on edge defensively. And we need him. There was no doubt when the season started if you would have asked me, he had, what, 28 points today, and I thought he would be a guy that would -- I looked this morning at our cumulative stats and I think he was averaging 11 points a game coming in here.

He's a guy -- you have asked me, I think that we thought he'd be a 16-, 18-point-a-game scorer for us. And we need him to do that.

**Q. You touched on this with encountering Chaminade in the past and I know one was in the early '90s so it was a little while ago, but anything tactically you felt you changed this time around encountering a team like that, or were they similar on their part?**

COACH BARNES: I think it always -- I think games like this, coaches are going to, like Robert said, we're going to do the same thing. We have a process we go through, and I think it gets down to players understanding that you respect every opponent. And like I said those two teams that had prior -- not to take anything away from Chaminade -- we weren't a very good basketball team, those two teams. We weren't very good. And it showed up as the season went on, because we weren't mentally tough enough to come in and play against a team that -- I mean they're a good team.

You go back, they battled Connecticut yesterday right down to the wire. Put up a good fight early against a team that, right now, North Carolina, that's playing like a team would be playing at the end of February. And I mean they're playing terrific.

But I think it goes back to players. I think this tournament, when you go three games in three days, regardless of your opponent, I do think the mental toughness factor comes in. Physically I think kids can

handle probably more than we want to give them credit for at times and probably make too much of that. But it's the mental side where guys maybe, like I really appreciate what John Fulkerson did. He hasn't played a lot. And he came in yesterday, did a terrific job. We started him today, he did a terrific job.

I think it goes back to the mental makeup of your team and each individual player.

**Q. You talked about yesterday learning how to win games down the stretch. What else do you leave here most concerned about or needing to work on the most?**

COACH BARNES: Little things like, I mean, even though the game you would think it would be over, Grant shooting a 3 in that situation. Jordan Bowden trying to cut back door for no reason. Understanding the time and score, possessions, those type of things.

But the biggest thing with our guys is in here -- I'm not sure we could have had a tougher schedule. I'll be quite honest with you I tried to get out of this tournament when I got to Tennessee because I knew we were going to be bringing in seven, eight new freshmen and we couldn't do it.

But also told him I said this is going to give you a chance early to understand there's a big difference between high school basketball and high level basketball.

I think they realize that. And so my concern coming in was that they, again, I think that we have talent. It's young talent. But we need our older guys, we need Robert Hubbs to do what he did today.

We need a guy like Lew Evans helping us. And Detrick has been splendid in what he's done. He really bought into his role and obviously no one is going to play perfectly. But he's embraced what he needs to do and there's not one person that played in this tournament that didn't show us that they're capable of doing what we think they can do. And now it's a matter of continue to grow. I think we can be a much better defensive team. I thought yesterday, I thought we were really good defensively, as good as we've been. Today's a -- Chaminade, because they shoot the ball so deep, you have to make adjustments, things we don't normally practice and for the most part our guys did a great job with it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.