

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 14, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Ohio State Buckeyes

Jake Diebler

Bruce Thornton

Postgame Press Conference

Ohio State - 90, Iowa - 78

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Ohio State, Coach Jake Diebler, along with Bruce Thornton.

JAKE DIEBLER: Obviously really proud of just how connected our team was on both sides of the ball. I thought we made some really good adjustments at halftime defensively. They're a really, really talented team. They have some veterans who are capable of having big nights and certainly really well coached.

So we knew this was going to be a 40-minute game that we knew they were capable of going on big runs. But I wanted to stay aggressive. I felt like our guys stayed together and stayed aggressive for 40 minutes.

Q. Bruce, what's it like playing for this guy, the ball of energy next to you, to just see the excitement out of him at what you guys are doing on the court?

BRUCE THORNTON: He's one of the reasons I came to Ohio State. Playing for this guy last year and this year have been fun. It's been an exciting roller coaster of events.

You couldn't tell me that my two years of college were going to be like this, but I'm glad it panned out like this. We're winning games. Everybody is connected. So everything is good right now.

Q. Bruce, you hit a couple of three-pointers right at the beginning of the game. How good did that feel? Did that kind of put your mind at ease that it's going to be a good day? What's going through your mind when you're getting out early, I guess?

BRUCE THORNTON: It felt good, especially from last



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year. My first shot was an air ball. My first shot went in this time. So I was excited.

How Iowa was playing me, they was heavy in my gaps. So a lot of my teammates, I had to hit the wide open guy and they made shots tonight. When a guy hits shots like that, it's really easy on offense. To get stops, that's why we came out with a win today.

Q. You guys went on an run in the tournament last year in Chicago. Do you feel like the same vibes are starting to pop up with this team right now? What are you thinking, I guess? What's going through your mind as you're one game in what could be four?

BRUCE THORNTON: Sure. We're trying to win the whole game, but we're trying to take it one game at a time. Tomorrow we have to go 1-0 again. We did it today. We had great preparation and great attention in our walkthrough at the hotel.

Tonight we got to make sure we get our body in recovery. Do the same thing tomorrow, go 1-0, and keep advancing.

Q. Coach, you're the coach at the Ohio State University. You've got these guys playing at the highest level. What does it mean to you to lead these guys?

JAKE DIEBLER: I haven't really spent a lot of time to step back and think about that, but when you put it that way, it's almost like living a dream right now. I think the circumstances certainly are unfortunate. Coach Holtmann means so much to me personally, and he's had a great influence on me as a coach and as a person.

But the easy part in this has been, when I met with Gene Smith and we discussed kind of how to do this, he gave me great advice. Just it's about the players.

So that's why I got into coaching, was to be able to connect with guys and help them grow both on and off the court. So that part was really easy and natural for me, and that's been my focus. Serving our players and this program has meant so much to me and my family, because of our family

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history with this program, that's been the focus.

Q. Jake, you guys were on such a roll there, four straight to end the regular season. Was there any hesitation, any thought, are we going to carry this over to the postseason? And you guys more than answered that. What was kind of your thought about carrying it over?

JAKE DIEBLER: Yeah, I didn't have any thoughts because of the leadership of this team and how connected our guys have been really every day in practice. That gave me great confidence that we were going to come out and play and continue to play how we've been playing.

We've talked about it. We still have to get better. We still have to try to have longer stretches of aggressiveness on both sides of the ball and just maybe a higher level communication. I thought our communication wasn't as good as it needed to be in the first half, but our guys, they responded.

No, Steve, I didn't have any doubts because of our leadership and how connected our guys have been.

Q. Just one other thing I want to ask. Everybody seems to believe coming into this that you get two wins, you have a really good chance of making the tournament. I know you're concerned about the basketball, and every day putting out your best effort and everything. What would that mean tomorrow if you're able to beat a great team like Illinois and position yourselves a little bit better perhaps?

JAKE DIEBLER: It would mean a great deal. Listen, when this happened back in the middle of February, we talked about just the opportunity that was in front of us, and our guys have earned the right to embrace how meaningful these games are.

So we're not shying away from what's at stake, but we're able to do that because of how mature our group is, and they understand that, in order to keep going, we have to focus on the task at hand, and we have to continue to get a little tougher, a little more together, and sustain our urgency and aggressiveness for as long as we can and keep pushing for a 40-minute game of those things.

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Iowa Hawkeyes

Fran McCaffery

Tony Perkins

Payton Sandfort

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THE MODERATOR: We're joined by the University of Iowa, head Coach Fran McCaffery, and student-athletes Tony Perkins and Payton Sandfort. We're going to go straight to questions for the student-athletes.

Q. This question is for Tony and Payton. In the first half, Ohio State hit its first five three-pointers and then 8 out of 11. What was happening on the defensive end that was leaving everybody so open?

TONY PERKINS: I would just say we didn't give them enough pressure. It was comfortable, you know. They got great players on their team, and we let them get comfortable shots and let their best player get shots that they hit. So that's the reason why.

PAYTON SANDFORT: I would just say we let them get way too comfortable early, and players at this level, if you let them get comfortable, they'll take advantage of that. If we let them do that, I think it's easy.

Some were open, some were contested, but you let them get comfortable, that's what happens.

Q. I guess this is for both of you as well. This season's been kind of a roller coaster at times with the way you ended it, before today, I should say. It showed a lot of growth. Can you take any solace from that, or is it too early, too raw to kind of look and appreciate the accomplishments?

TONY PERKINS: I'm the type of guy who always looks at the positive side. So we had some growth. We had a young team. So I think them going through this year



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allowed them to grow and see how far you've got to get to make it to the NCAA Tournament and how to play and how not to play, if you want to be a winner in this league or you don't.

PAYTON SANDFORT: I think, you know, it's hard to say right now, but obviously, as a leader of this team, I'm really proud of the way that everybody kind of grew over the year. It would have been easy to quit when we were backs against the wall.

We took some tough losses, but we just kept fighting and kept finding ways to stay in the fight. That's why I'm so proud of so many guys. There's guys that have been here that have had great careers, and there's guys that are going to have great careers. But the way that we gelled down the stretch, I think, was special.

It wasn't an easy thing, but I love everybody in that room. That's the only feeling I have right now.

Q. Fran, I wanted to ask you about the trajectory of the season because there were certain junctures where it looked like your team was going to fall apart and sink south, instead they galvanized and played well at various times. Is it too raw in the moment to appreciate the growth, or can you reflect on maybe what they've accomplished?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I don't think it's too early. I'm really proud of this group. It's hard to win 18 games with the schedule we had, and you're right. We had some tough times. We had some tough losses, but we had some great wins. We won some close games. We stayed together. I thought our young guys continued to get better and continued to produce.

You know, not just Owen, who was the Rookie of the Year, but our other freshmen who played a lot. Ben Krikke being new, okay, he's a veteran guy, but he's new. I thought we fit in really well. We have great chemistry in that locker room, and I'm really proud of this team.

We all want to go a little further, but fortunately we'll get to keep playing.

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Q. Is it going to be hard in the next few days, or will it be easy to get this group to say there's still more basketball and time left to play?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Yeah, I'm not worried about that. They'll be fine.

Q. Kind of on the earlier question I asked the players about the first half three-pointers. They made their first five, 8 out of their first 11 in the first half. Was there something schematic you weren't doing correctly or just the way that they were hitting?

FRAN McCAFFERY: There always is to a degree. We had a couple of mix-ups on out of bounds under, but the hard thing with this team is they have multiple three-pointer shooters. So you know, we did a good job on Battle, but then Middleton gets free, Chatman hits one. Thornton's a handful. He hit a couple.

You're more worried about him penetrating, and with his pullup game and creating. So he hit a couple early. Then Roddy Gayle hit one, and you expected him to be more of a driver.

So at some point you've got to give the other team credit and not say, wow, we should have done this or he didn't do that and start pointing fingers. Sometimes you just tip your hat to them.

Q. Obviously all your guys gave as much effort as they could. Payton in particular being one of your leaders, it kind of seemed like he was trying to will you guys back in it. He did that periodically throughout the game. Talk about his performance and how you thought he played.

FRAN McCAFFERY: I thought it was particularly impressive considering how he was being guarded. So I'm really proud of him.

Q. Fran, Payton was in a real rhythm early, then he got that second foul. We asked him about that. He even had trouble commenting, he was so emotional. It just seemed like that took him out of the rhythm there, and he did get it back in the second half, but it seemed like he was really rolling when he got that second foul, and it really hurt him.

FRAN McCAFFERY: It hurt him. It hurt us. I think it was really hard for him because he didn't think he fouled. I think he was trying very hard not to foul there. So I think it was a combination of frustration and knowing that we needed him.

But he just keeps coming. He's really impressive. Just couldn't be more proud of him.

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