

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 16, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Wisconsin Badgers

Greg Gard

John Tonje

Max Klesmit

John Blackwell

Postgame Press Conference

Michigan - 59, Wisconsin - 53

GREG GARD: This one stings, but as I told the team, I couldn't ask for any more in terms of what they've given us and how they played today other than we didn't make shots. I mean, we battled like crazy.

You're in a one-possession game or a tie game with under a minute to go, and that's sometimes how it happens. We didn't make shots when we needed to. Credit goes to Michigan for making one more or two more.

Like I said, this group has battled like crazy all year. Today was no different. We put ourselves in a good position, as hard as today is, that we're going to play next week.

Q. For all three of you guys, four games in four days, Max and John Blackwell, you guys have been through that before, but do you feel like fatigue potentially played a factor in that today. And how tough is it to do what you guys did today, play four games in four days and have a game like this where it's as physical as it was?

JOHN BLACKWELL: I think we're well conditioned. I don't think the fatigue was an issue. I think we played our hearts out. I think we gave it everything we've got, just came up short.

MAX KLESMIT: I thought we played -- yeah, I don't think our conditioning had anything to do with it. Just not enough shots went in.

JOHN TONJE: I'm not looking for any excuses. Just kind



of like they said, shots didn't fall today.

Q. John Tonje, when the shots aren't falling, it looked like you and your teammates sort of adjusted and went to more attacking the basket in the second half. Can you talk about that, and how successful do you think that was in terms of keeping the offense somewhat productive?

JOHN TONJE: We just tried to be aggressive and switch it up a little bit when shots weren't falling, but it just wasn't enough to keep us afloat.

Q. Both Johns and Max, the first half of that game, it felt like you guys and Michigan were feeling out each other, seeing where you guys' weakness were. Talk a little bit about both your defense on Michigan and Michigan's defense on you guys one by one.

MAX KLESMIT: I thought we did a really good job defensively. I thought our 4s and 5s battled really hard all game, tried to make Wolf and Goldin's life as hard as they possibly could.

JOHN BLACKWELL: I thought we did a great job in the first half -- the whole game defensively, just a few mishaps late in the game.

We haven't played them since December, I don't think, so we're kind of a new team since then, and they're kind of a new team since then. We're just adjusting in the game flow.

Q. Max and John Blackwell, you guys kind of went through a similar path last year, a really strong Big Ten tournament and a close game in the championship. How do you guys -- what's kind of this next week going to look like to kind of make sure you guys go into the NCAA Tournament now strong and kind of avoid how last year ended?

JOHN BLACKWELL: I think, first of all, just taking care of our bodies, getting back to Madison and just taking care of our bodies, eating the right stuff and making sure we're ready to go, whatever day we play, either Thursday or

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Friday.

Q. Greg, tough nose-to-nose, foot-to-foot defensive battle. Talk about where you thought things went well and where you thought things were a little bit more difficult.

GREG GARD: I thought we had pretty good looks really the whole game, and knowing that both of us have really good defensive teams, we know, even though we've only played once, I think we know each other pretty well. It came down to -- I'll go through the tape, but I don't think I could have asked for better looks than the ones we got, even late on an out-of-bounds play. Blackwell got to the rim.

It was just one of those where we needed to draw a few more fouls and/or knock down some more shots from the perimeter when we had a chance. We had some wide open looks, one on the corner. Blackwell had one wide open up off the slot, up one.

If you're going to win a championship, you've got to make a play, and part of making a play is knocking down a shot in a tight ballgame.

Q. You mentioned a bit you guys -- in the last few games, you guys have been able to get to the free-throw line pretty good, and you've been able to hit a lot of free throws. What do you think was the difference today with you guys attacking the rim that maybe didn't result in as many trips to the free-throw line?

GREG GARD: I'll grade out the tape. I normally grade our play, but I grade how -- did we not draw contact? Did we not play through contact? Did they let us just play? That's one thing that you always try to get a feel for how it's getting called.

It was extremely physical. Bodies -- it's a physical game, and both teams were not backing off on either end, specifically in the paint. The fact that we got the ball in the paint, shot chart looked pretty good for the most part. You've got to finish some things at the rim, and we've got to do a better job, I guess, of drawing contact if we didn't get fouled when we went in there.

Q. I don't want to look too forward, but potentially you guys have the chance to play in Milwaukee. Coming off of this week with the momentum you guys had, how big would that be?

GREG GARD: It's huge. We played well in Milwaukee. I think we've been there three times. We've played well.

We've not played well there.

It's great for our fans obviously if we can be close, great for our students, great for our alums. Obviously the players we have that are from the local area, it's easier for their families.

But we're going to play a good team here in a few minutes. All the bad teams are on spring break. There's only good ones left, really good ones. So wherever we get sent. If it is Milwaukee, we'll use the week to prepare for whoever they pair us with.

Q. Greg, I guess I'm wondering, given how the offense struggled but was still a one- or two-possession game, I guess I'm wondering do you leave here in somewhat a weird way maybe bolstered it in terms of the confidence you have in this group?

GREG GARD: Oh, yeah, I have never lost confidence in this group even when we lost a week ago. I know some people thought the sky was falling. This group is really good, and this group is battle tested.

We didn't get shots to go down. That's what happens this time of year. You've got to be able to make plays and score. As much as our offense struggled, so did theirs. It wasn't like either team was -- it was two teams just not giving an inch. You've just got to make a shot or two more.

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Dusty May

Vladislav Golden

Tre Donaldson

Danny Wolf

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THE MODERATOR: We have the Michigan Wolverines present. Coach May, we'll ask you to make an opening statement.

DUSTY MAY: First of all, we appreciate you guys hanging around, waiting on us to do what we needed to do.

I want to praise our guys' resiliency and their togetherness. For a majority of the game, it wasn't how we scripted it. It wasn't how we thought it would look like, but it was two heavyweights going at it back and forth tooth and nail.

Like I said, I'll give our guys credit for staying the course. Different guys stepped up, got us ignited. Then these guys took it over late and made plays.

Q. You guys have played some pretty physical games this year, whether it was Michigan State, Maryland, Purdue. This looked really physical, especially inside. How do you rate that against some of your other games this year?

DANNY WOLF: It was definitely they have great size up front. We've seen a lot of teams like that. I think, when we played them back at our place, they showed us some different things. We tried taking what the game gave us. I just don't think shots were falling really in general in this game.

Yeah, it was definitely a physical game.

VLADISLAV GOLDIN: That's what you expect to play in a



tournament, especially a Big Ten, the most physical conference in the country. That's what you expect going to play in these kind of games.

TRE DONALDSON: This is a physical game. When it comes down to tournament time and winning, it's going to be physical because teams want it so bad, and they're going to chase the ball, and other people are going to be in the way.

It's just the will to win. I think that's where the physicality comes from, the urge to want to win so badly. I feel like that plays a part in it. That's where we stepped in these past three games in the Big Ten tournament, just that physicality and that desire to win.

Q. Can all three of you talk about what it means to you to win the championship.

TRE DONALDSON: It means the world to me, and I think it feels -- I think the best feeling is seeing the guys from last year, the smiles on their faces. This is what we came here to do.

Coach recruiting us out of the portal, all three of us, this is what we came here for, and this is what we wanted to do. It means the world to me, I know that, and it means the world to my teammates. It's a blessing to play for something that's bigger than you. With this black M on our jersey, it's a legacy behind it.

To be able to stamp ourselves in history as a team through ups and downs is amazing.

VLADISLAV GOLDIN: I agree with Tre. It's insane how much impact we make on the community as well because it's insane how many kids, the young kids are looking to us and wants to be like us. We take pride to be like a role model for them.

DANNY WOLF: Obviously that's why we all came here. We talked about doing these things in the summer, whenever we were first together as a group. Obviously the end of the regular season did not end as we would have hoped.



Coach May said it right in the post-game speech, we have a new season approaching. This was part 1, and we have part 2 coming up soon.

I grew up watching games like these, and just so proud of how hard my teammates played. Our coaches put us in a great position to succeed. When it mattered, we were able to come away with the win.

Q. Can you guys talk about you had a lot of different contributors step up this tournament. Can you talk about L.J. or even a Rubin taking a bigger offensive load during this tournament and what that means to you guys?

TRE DONALDSON: Just the perseverance we have as a team. Going down the line, Rubin Jones, his season didn't start off as well as he wanted it to. Roddy Gayle, Will Tschetter, coming back from last year, L.J. Cason. Just our ability to stay together even though it's not going our way personally is the biggest thing. It shows our team's character, and that's big for us.

We're going to need those guys to step up, we need everybody to step up to win games. When their number was called, they're able to do that. We can't win games without those guys stepping up for sure.

DANNY WOLF: We've seen all these guys do things throughout the year. I think the entirety of our team was in somewhat of a slump to finish the regular season. Coach was talking about confidence and getting back to just what we were doing and playing with those free-flowing minds.

Tre stepped up the last few games, made some huge plays, Rubin was great. I thought Roddy was tremendous. Obviously he got a little hurt today. But when we needed it most, guys stepped up. We knew they were capable all along, and they just came out at the right time.

Q. Tre, you struggled in the first half of today's game, but you came out with like a killer instinct during money time. What was said at halftime? And basically just describe the moment.

TRE DONALDSON: It wasn't much said. I know who I am. My teammates know who I am. It was just a matter of, like I said, the desire to win. I wanted to win badly. I feel like in the first half it just didn't go our way.

Just coming out in the second half, it was just putting pressure on them. Somebody is going to have to do it, and it's just me bringing that energy. I felt that energy in the second half, and the ball fell my way and went in the

basket.

That was pretty much it. Just trying to give my teammates energy, and the ball ends up finding them.

Q. Vlad, you had a chance to take the lead with a free throw. You missed it, and you got back up a few minutes later and knocked down both. How did you put that miss behind you?

VLADISLAV GOLDIN: Sometimes you miss shots. You cannot think about it too much. Simple. That's it.

Q. Coach, what kind of a lift, how big of a lift was it when guys like LJ and Will hit those shots? Didn't look great for you, and those guys came up and made some big plays in big times.

DUSTY MAY: It really did. I don't remember what the details we talked about at halftime were, but I do remember us rallying around the fact we don't know what it's going to look like, how it's going to go, but we're going to dig deep and find a way, and it's going to be possession by possession.

We're not going to be living in the past. We're not going to be thinking about the errors we made. I think our guys did hold each other accountable. When we make mistakes, Wisconsin makes you pay for those mistakes. I thought we limited those types of plays, and even the ones we made, those guys made adjustments on the fly.

Just a hard fought performance. When you look at Wisconsin's team and you see how potent they are offensively -- and granted, we earned a break by not playing four in four days, and they had one extra game. We were optimistic that their legs might not hold up as well as ours just because of the number of games. Even in the first half, when that thing was ugly and whatnot, we wanted to keep running because we thought it might have a cumulative effect.

Credit our guys, they pushed through fatigue, they pushed through injuries. When you have a freshman step up and ignite it, and you have Will Tschetter bringing the passion he brings and knocking down shots and improving the spacing on the floor. Like I said, we have a lot of different ways to get the job done, and our guys believe it.

Q. Can you talk about LJ's stretch in the second half, I know you just referenced it, but those two big 3s and his aggressiveness all day.

DUSTY MAY: If you know LJ Cason, he's never going to be unaggressive. He's going to put the pedal to the metal.

We know him, and that's the beautiful thing about him choosing to join us at Michigan. We know what his DNA is. We know his background. We know who he is to the core.

So we never lost faith. It's tough to be a freshman, especially at this level with the glut of older players. The one thing with LJ, he hit that freshman wall, and it looked gloomy. I'm not going to lie. He busted through that thing and found a new energy.

If he didn't have that substance, we're not sitting here. Another team is on this podium now.

Q. Got two questions for you. Such a physical basketball game, and it really wasn't reaching, it really wasn't odd ball fouls, it was everybody moving their feet, everybody into the game. Second question is what do you think everybody down in Eastern Greene and Salisbury is thinking right now about Dusty May?

DUSTY MAY: I hope they know -- I'll start with the second one first. I hope they know how proud I am to be from there and have the relationships and connections and work ethic that the people poured into me. So very, very grateful.

Back to the physicality, that's how we were raised at Eastern Greene. My old coach Mark Barnhizer, he created a culture of extremely high standards and toughness and team-first mentality, a lot like the former great coaches at our university.

Couldn't be more grateful for all of the people that made us work harder than we wanted to and felt like it and just pushed us and challenged us to be the best we could be.

Q. Can you talk about what your defense did to John Tonje? I think he was 1 for 14 to finish. He didn't score for the first 25 minutes of the game.

DUSTY MAY: First of all, he's an extremely tough cover. A lot of people had him as Player of the Year in the league, and in our league there are a lot of really great players. So he was at the top of the list.

I thought our discipline, I thought our -- he's so good at getting downhill and getting you off balance and getting you in the air and drawing fouls. He got to the line eight times, and I thought that was incredibly important to keep him single digits.

I thought overall we contested all of his shots. I thought, even when we were behind the plays, we made an effort to challenge and contest everything, and I thought we made him work on both sides of the ball. That's what you have to

do against great players like these guys -- Tonje and Blackwell, and obviously Winter and Crowell and those guys, and Klesmit's won a lot of ball games.

Those guys, if you don't challenge every spot, every movement, then they're going to make you play.

Q. Dusty, can you talk a little bit about the three big lineup you went to after it got tight in the second half. Probably had the most success you've had all season with it today.

DUSTY MAY: Yeah, I'll give the staff a lot of credit. It's something we've talked about using, and we've never had to at times. In this game, Roddy Gayle had a hamstring situation, and we felt like we just needed some spacing. So they made the suggestion as a group, and it didn't take long to agree to that because it's what we needed. We have faith that Danny Wolf and Vlad and Will all can sit down and guard 1 through 5s. We trust them to do that.

So I thought that was the difference in the game. Once LJ got us going, that big lineup with great shooting, size. Other than one defensive error, I thought they played almost perfect basketball where they generated good offense, they worked well together, and defensively they were physical and locked into the scouting report.

Q. Wisconsin was your first Big Ten game, and now it's your final Big Ten game going into the NCAA Tournament. Can you talk a little bit about how the team has grown from that first game, first Big Ten game to now, areas of improvement, areas where you still see you need growth.

DUSTY MAY: If we didn't improve drastically, we wouldn't have been able to win this game. Wisconsin is much, much better than they were, I think it was December 6. I'm going to take a shot at the Big Ten. As soon as I saw the schedule released, I looked at it and said our staff's first Big Ten coaching game, we go to Madison, Wisconsin. Jokes aside.

So that one gave us confidence, though, that we can go on the road and beat the best teams. That's the type of respect and admiration we have for their coaches, their players, their program, their discipline, their culture. I could go on and on. So that was the first one where once we found a way to get that one done, we thought, okay, we can really do this.

We believed it, but sometimes you need a little bit of evidence that can happen, and I thought that game gave us that evidence.

Q. Talk a little bit about what we just all found out. You're a 5. You got any thoughts on where you're coming in for the NCAA Tournament?

DUSTY MAY: Denver is one of my favorite cities on the planet. We're going to go out there and hopefully run up and down like the Nuggets. We'll get used to the altitude and be excited for the challenge. It's obviously different for all of us.

Just grateful to be a part of this event. It's the greatest spectacle. I remember being a young kid and the school bus drops you off. Where you're from and where I'm from, they don't drop you off at your door. Sprinting home and turning on the TV and watching that first game you could.

So just to be a part of it and do it with this group of guys that have sacrificed and fought and just stayed together when it wasn't easy, just an honor and a privilege to go keep playing with this group.

Q. You talked a lot about this season that winning championships brings teams together forever. Now that you guys have won this tournament, what do you think it means to you and to the team as a whole?

DUSTY MAY: In all honesty, it's great for these guys. They're going to bring their grandkids and their children and they're going to point up at that picture. You see those banners in Crisler. Crisler is clean and crisp, and when you're part of one of those, it's really, really cool.

For me, it confirms that we're going to be able to bring this group back in 5 years, in 10 years, in 20 years, because I care a lot more about that than I do the actual banner. The banner and the number, the year is just a symbol of this group coming together and doing something special. More importantly, I know that these guys are going to come back in 10 years and tell stories about this tournament, and tell stories about the time we got knocked on our tails the last three games of the regular season and how we responded.

Ultimately, we're very proud. When you have a history and a legacy like Michigan, you're very proud to be a part of it, but it's great that I know this team will have a bond for eternity.

Q. There's a lot of talent out there in the portal. You went out and brought in two bigs and a point guard. But more importantly, it was their personalities that blended with what you already had. How did you make that selection?

DUSTY MAY: I'll be honest, I don't think -- I don't want to use a bad word. Guys that aren't about the team, guys that

don't put others first, they don't like us. We have a staff of driven, hungry, intelligent, self-aware guys, and they model the behavior every single day, completely together.

Then for whatever reason, the guys we go after, they share the same character traits and values. So it really just happens organically. There's signs that pop up and red flags, and we usually try to go the other way, or we just try to dig a little bit deeper and analyze whether we can help them or do they really fit us.

We have a lot of trust, and we're not just chasing the banner. We want to be around guys who have the same, I guess, ambition that we have and have the same care for others and people. So it just kind of happens. We go watch them and how they interact with each other and what programs they come from.

The guys, they came from great coaches before -- other than Vlad, his was average -- but the rest of the guys we brought from the portal came from great programs and great coaches, so we're thankful for that (laughter).

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