

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Northwestern Wildcats

Chris Collins

Ty Berry

Nick Martinelli

Postgame Press Conference

Northwestern - 72, Minnesota - 64

THE MODERATOR: We've been joined by Northwestern. Coach, we'll start with an opening statement.

CHRIS COLLINS: Just really, really proud of our guys. Obviously everyone knows the kind of year we've been through. Sorry with my breath. We had to walk a mile to get up here. I'm getting old, getting out of shape.

Our guys are just a tough group of guys. They've had a lot thrown at them. Even last night, they put us in a hotel, the rooms were a thousand degrees. There was no AC in the hotel, and our guys' rooms were 85 degrees, and that's where the league puts you. Every way they turn, they're trying to get us, and our guys just are a resilient bunch.

They just fought, and they played with a toughness and a chip on their shoulder. It was a really good win because we knew Minnesota, they're a tough-minded team. They're a tough-minded team. That's why they got here. Ben's had a helluva year with those guys.

To me, it was a real even matchup because you had Garcia and Nick the two top scorers and just two kind of gritty, tough teams. Our guys made enough plays. We had a spurt in the second half where we got some separation, and obviously we had to make some free throws down the stretch.

Just happy to live to see another day and keep playing. Super proud of these guys. Their leadership has been awesome the past month.

Q. Ty, yesterday you talked a little bit about how you were looking for more open looks, playing more



aggressively. The last game I know Nick had 29 points, and no one else was in double-digit scoring. What do you think was working for you and for KJ and Jordan to have bigger outputs today?

TY BERRY: I think, when you have the best player in the league on your team, he has so much attention drawn to him every night. Just finding ways to play off him and taking our open shots, and just being confident when they send the house at Nick.

Q. Nick, Ty just called you the best player in the league. You were named to the Second All Big Ten team when those results came out. Did not making the first team kind of fuel the fire for you today?

NICK MARTINELLI: I don't really think so. Obviously I'm not super into comparison. I'm more into like competition and things of that nature. I'm not motivated by that at all.

What I'm motivated by is the guys that are with me every single day that have faith in me that actually get to see the work that's put into it. I take my time and give all my time and emotion to those guys as opposed to people that obviously just see games and whatever and have their opinions.

Yeah, I'm definitely just grateful to come out here and show people that we are a serious team. I think we've shown that every single game. We've been competing even with guys going down. So I definitely think -- yeah, I don't think necessarily it fueled me today. It's more these guys.

Q. This is for both players. How did you handle 85 degrees in the hotel room? Did you sleep with the windows open? How did that go?

TY BERRY: I just slept on top of the covers. Couldn't get under the covers. It was hot all night. I was tossing and turning.

At the end of the day, you've just got to play through stuff. I just credit our team and our guys for just being tough.

NICK MARTINELLI: I remember last night like when it was



happening, we were kind of just like joking around, oh, this is gritty. Me and Gelo had a bucket of ice, and we were just grabbing the ice and rubbing it on ourselves all night to try to stay cool.

Honestly, I'm not going to say I'm happy it happened, but we came out here, and we showed them.

CHRIS COLLINS: We're used to being treated like that by this league.

Q. Actually, that was along the same lines is how much rest did you guys have, and how did it impact what you were able to do? This time of year, you guys have played a long season. You're trying to recover as much as you can each and every day. How much sleep did you get? Did everything get fixed in the morning? Are you still working through it? Have you changed hotels?

NICK MARTINELLI: It was super hot this morning. I don't think they've changed anything, but yeah, we're just going to go back there and sleep in 80 degrees again.

CHRIS COLLINS: They'll put us in one that's hotter if we leave it up to the league.

TY BERRY: Also, I credit our coaches for making sure we are right on rest and right on nutrition and all that stuff. They do a good job of not putting too much on our plates at practice, just because we're short on numbers. That does a good job on our bodies of keeping us fresh.

Hopefully it's not as hot, but it probably will be.

Q. For both of the players, Jordan Clayton was really aggressive off the dribble tonight. How did his aggressiveness, his tenacity help open up the offense for you guys?

TY BERRY: I just feel like Jordan is a good player. He's in this league for a reason, and we count on him to be aggressive. When he's aggressive and he's taking his open looks, it creates more for everybody else and it just really spreads the floor for everybody.

NICK MARTINELLI: I definitely think his aggressiveness helped open things up, even for me a lot of times when he's coming downhill super fast. So guys really have to help over, and it got me some open looks.

Yeah, we're going to need him to continue to be aggressive throughout the remainder of the tournament.

Q. Nick, this is your second 25-plus point game

against Minnesota. What do you think it is about this matchup against them that's advantageous for you?

NICK MARTINELLI: Credit to the coaches again. They do a great job with game planning and see things, see openings for me and just put me in great spots. Sometimes you just have it going, sometimes you don't. You kind of don't necessarily get to pick your nights where you're shooting it well from the field.

Yeah, I'm just happy that obviously we could come out here and get the win. I think it's a credit to my teammates as well, who are giving me the ball in the right spots.

Q. Ty, you had a tough first half shooting the ball, 1-for-7 from the field. How do you maintain confidence to come back out and hit three 3s in the second half?

TY BERRY: I think part of it is getting a feel for the gym, getting a feel for the arena. It's different, just the atmosphere. And just coming out and staying aggressive in the second half.

My coaches, my teammates, they believe in me to knock down shots, so just never losing confidence and taking the right ones when they're there.

Q. Nick, what was going through your head when you were missing some of those free throws in the last couple minutes?

NICK MARTINELLI: I obviously wasn't happy with myself. When you shoot as many free throws as I do, sometimes you just miss them. Obviously I don't have a gym to go to to go work on it, but if I was back at home --

CHRIS COLLINS: Rest, rest.

NICK MARTINELLI: -- I'd work on it as much as I could. Yeah, obviously disappointing, but as I said multiple times, it's really about the win. It's really about these guys.

Q. For either of you guys, you had the 10-0 surge kind of at the start of the second half. What allowed you guys to kind of pull away there?

TY BERRY: I just think that coming out and staying aggressive on the defensive end was really what helped us pull away. We came out and just got multiple stops in a row. By doing that, we were able to run out and get into a good offense. Coach was calling great plays for us to get open and get easy shots.

When we play defense like that, we're a really tough team.

Q. Despite having great regular seasons each for the past two years, you guys weren't able to win a Big Ten tournament game in either of the past two seasons. What does it mean to pick up this win and win a tournament game? Nick, your first win in a Big Ten tournament situation.

NICK MARTINELLI: It means a lot. Sort of a different feeling here because you're playing the next day. So at this point, I feel like me and Ty are honestly locked in on the next game. I think a lot of the guys down there are just getting ready for the next game and trying to find ways to fuel our bodies and rest up. Yeah, but it's a great feeling.

Q. For both of you guys, early 10-0 run in the second half kind of opened up the game for you guys and ultimately held on the entire way. What was the message at halftime by the coaches that got you guys to that?

TY BERRY: I think it was just being physical on the defensive end to start the second half. I think that was the main thing is to not let up. They went on a little run at the end of the first half to cut it down to three. So then I just think just the message in the locker room was just stay very physical and aggressive on defense and get stops.

Q. Two things. One is I want to see what you have to say about Nick and the first team versus second team thing. Then you don't seem pleased with the Big Ten. Can you elaborate at all? What are you getting at? It's more than a hotel, it looks like.

CHRIS COLLINS: No. You guys watch the games. I don't have to get anything. You guys are the ones tweeting out how we're being officiated and how we're being treated. I don't have to say anything. You guys watch the same games I do, so I'm not going to get into any of that stuff.

Nick is one of the best players in the conference. It was incredibly hard even for me. When you have an 18-team league, it's really hard to pick five guys when you have 18 great programs. It's really difficult.

Honestly, I think if coaches had to do it over again, the way we had to get our votes in by Sunday afternoon, I think a lot of votes were already in before the games were completed on Sunday, which at that point, if you didn't watch all the Sunday games, Nick wasn't the leading scorer in the conference. We didn't know who was in the tournament and who wasn't.

I think I'll give the coaches a break on that because it is hard and it's very difficult to vote. But if you watched that game out there, if you can tell me there's five more

impactful players in this conference, I'd be happy to talk about that with you, and that's no slight on any other guys.

You look out there, Nick is playing with unproven players, some guys who didn't play the first 20 games of the season, young players, guys trying to find themselves. He's seeing double and triple-teams every time he touches the ball. His competitive will has just been amazing, and he's played great. I'm just so proud to be on his team because honestly I'm riding his wave. It's fun as a coach when you can ride a great player's wave and just kind of let him -- let his heart lead the way, and that's what's happened with this team.

Nick Martinelli's heart -- we were sitting at 4-11 in the league. We had a really hard-fought loss to Nebraska where we blew a 20-point lead at home with five games to go, with two guys down, two of our very best players. Nick Martinelli just said, we are going to have a winning season. We are going to have a winning season, because for him he's never had a losing season at Northwestern. He's won 22 games his first two years, and he said, we are going to have a winning season.

Now from that point on, we've won five ball games. That's a credit to him, and then Ty and Matt as well as older guys, as guys who have won a lot in our program.

Man, I couldn't be prouder of the group and the guys and the resilience and the toughness. It's really hard to win in this league against who you're playing against and the level of coaches, and this was a really good win for us today.

Q. Obviously the focus is on the here and now, but the Indiana job is set to open, and your name has appeared on a few hot boards, a few coaching lists. Would you care to comment on that?

CHRIS COLLINS: No, I'm coaching my team. I'm not -- people, my family and all that might be on social media, but I'm not one of these guys that's looking at any of that stuff.

I'm locked in. You guys know, if you don't see me over there coaching, I'm locked in on my team, and that's where it is right now. I'm getting ready to play one of the best teams in the country tomorrow. So I'd better put my full focus on that.

Q. Talk a little bit about Mullins and Windham, those guys.

CHRIS COLLINS: And Clayton too.

Q. Clayton had some guts tonight.

CHRIS COLLINS: Yeah, all three of those guys. That's what I'm getting at. You talk about a guy like Justin Mullins, he's been in and out of our rotation the first 20 games. All of a sudden, you lose two perimeter guys, and he becomes a starter. And Clayton was redshirted. What a story. He volunteers, puts his hand up and says, my team needs me after sitting for 20 games.

For him to come out today on the biggest stage and get 11 points and play great defense and take care of the ball and be poised, all three of those guys were big. I thought we did a good job. We didn't turn the ball over. They tried to press us late in the game.

The free throws were the thing, but it wasn't because we were turning it over. We were doing a good job, but we weren't making the free throws at the end of the day, and that's where we've got to do better.

All three of those guys are doing a great job. Everybody knows the attention that's on Nick, and everyone's kind of found their rhythm about how they can play off of him and where to get the spots and how to be opportunistic offensively, but then play great defense and be tough-minded, hard-nosed players, and all three of those guys did that as well.

Q. First game against Minnesota you went really big. Luke Hunger played alongside your centers for a lot of minutes. Today you went very small with Berry, Clayton, and Windham on at the same time for most of the second half. Why the stylistic change?

CHRIS COLLINS: I thought we needed the ball handling. Part of it too is Jordan was playing so well, and then Justin got in foul trouble. So we kind of went to a smaller backcourt there. A lot of it, they were trying to extend their pressure, and I wanted my two best ball handlers in the game, and I felt they were playing well.

Ideally we want to be in a situation, we do a lot of switching, 1 through 4. The first game, Nick had gotten in foul trouble, and Luke came in the game and did a nice job in the first half in Minnesota. Tonight we were able to keep Nick on the floor. Obviously he's a warrior. I got him a couple minutes rest -- I didn't look at it, maybe one.

So if he's going to be on the floor, then that allows us to kind of stay in our scheme and kind of switch things. Fortunately, our guards were getting in there -- to your point, if you're going to play like that, you'd better rebound. I thought our guys really got down there and rebounded the ball well.

Q. Looking ahead to that matchup tomorrow, the last time you guys played Wisconsin, it was that first game after you shut Brooks down. Just what have you learned in the 11 games since that you're bringing back into that matchup tomorrow?

CHRIS COLLINS: I think we've gotten better. Jalen played in that game, and he was fantastic. I'm going to get sad watching the film tonight of that game because he was big time. I remember him having a huge game. That was, I think, his second-to-last game.

We were really emotional that day, and I thought we played really hard. In the second half, they wore us down.

Unfortunately in life I have really good recall for basketball. I don't have good recall for other stuff. My wife would agree with you. I can't remember birthdays and taking the trash out and all that, but I can remember every game I've coached and played.

In that one, we gave up over 50 points in the second half. They did a really good job. Obviously Tonje really hurt us, but also Carter Gilmore was huge in that game. That's the beauty of Wisconsin's team. They have so many guys who can step up. They have great players across the board, and they're a really veteran team, super well-coached. Greg does a great job. You'd better be locked in and ready to go or they'll expose you on some things.

We'd better get some rest. We'll watch some film. Obviously do a little bit of walk-through, and be ready to fight tomorrow afternoon.

Q. Nick scored 28 plus three time in the last five games. How special is it to do that good while there is so much defensive focus on him? Normally he's a good free-throw shooter, little tougher night anecdotally. Have you ever asked him to stop hopping on his free throws?

CHRIS COLLINS: You've got to be careful. My guy -- you guys know Pat Goss, my right hand man out there, who runs our golf department. I'm a big golfer, and so much of sports is mental. If you start screwing with a guy's mental like in golf, he and I were talking about one of their players where somebody said something to him about that as well with their golf swing, like, hey, why do you move your foot like that or why do you do that? And the guy lost his game for like two months. He couldn't break 80, a plus handicap player.

You've got to be careful with free-throw shooting. Free-throw shooting can become mental. You've got to be instinctive. Now is not the time to change it. As we get to

the off-season and you have a whole off-season to practice another way, he's comfortable with that. Now is not the time to get in his head about it. He just needs to be confident and go up there.

There's been plenty of games he shot it great. I don't want to make a big deal of it. It was one of those games tonight where he shot it poorly from the free-throw line.

Q. I just wanted to ask you about sometimes with hotel issues people can get really frustrated, especially parents and whatever. In your case, what did you try to do -- what did you try to ask the hotel about? Did you report it to the Big Ten?

CHRIS COLLINS: Yeah, we did all those things. My AD is big time. He's here. We reported right away. I guess it's an issue they've been having. That's what I'm frustrated about. It wasn't like it just sprung on. They said they've had this issue for the past ten days at that hotel. So that's what made me frustrated.

You just hate it for the guys. I have seniors that they're playing for their lives, and they come down and said, Coach, I have to have an ice bucket next to my bed. It's steaming hot. Even this morning after we did our walk-through, our guys had to sit in the lobby or sit in our team room. They couldn't even go to their rooms.

You guys know, the worst thing you want to do before a game is sit in a sauna for two hours. You guys know how it makes you feel.

I'm frustrated about it. I don't know what can be done. That's just me being a coach and wanting the best for my guys.

I've got Ty Berry. The next time he loses, his career is over. So I want to give him an opportunity with rest and hydration and all those things. We're going to need a better night's sleep, so we'll figure things out. If not, we'll be ready to play.

Our guys are resilient. There's been a lot of stuff happening to this team on and off the floor. They just keep showing up and fighting. If they've got to sleep in 85 degree weather and that's what the league wants us to do, we'll figure it out and come back tomorrow and fight and do our best against Wisconsin.

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BEN JOHNSON: Obviously give a lot of credit to Northwestern. Chris does a great job with their crew, and they've got a really good culture built and expectation of winning and the standard of winning.

When you make the NCAA Tournament, just the overall vibe that you can feel within that program is really strong. Credit to him. Credit to their guys.

I thought our guys battled in stretches really, really good and gave ourselves a chance in stretches and just couldn't do the things we needed to in the second half to keep it manageable. They did a good job closing it.

Q. Both guys, just talk a little bit about the end of the season and what you were playing for. You got to the Big Ten tournament. That was your first goal. What the mindset was coming into this game.

PARKER FOX: I think just proud of the way we kind of were resilient and pushed back after starting 0-6. I talked about it in the media a lot, we had a deep senior class and guys that wanted to keep playing, guys that really liked being around each other, liked playing for Coach Johnson. It kind of stinks the way that it finished out here.

I think at the end of the day we accomplished some good things this year. We had way higher goals, but just proud of the way the guys fought. Yeah, wish we had more hoops, that's for sure.

DAWSON GARCIA: Nobody expected us to be here. We expected to be here and do better. So I guess we fooled everybody. But disappointed ourselves.



Q. You're Minnesota guys. You watched this program for a long time. Beyond this season, what are the expectations that you felt like when you first got here that you hope continue to be in the goals for this program?

DAWSON GARCIA: I care a lot about this program and everybody in it and the state. Just because I may not be able to have a jersey anymore doesn't mean that -- I'm going to still be representing.

PARKER FOX: I think it's a no-brainer for me to come here and to come home, to be around my family, to be around a program that I've supported my whole life, and to put trust in this guy. I can't thank him enough for that, just allowing me to kind of live out my dreams. It will be something that I hold close to my heart for the rest of my life.

Knowing that just because -- like Dawson said, just because I can't wear the jersey again doesn't mean I'm not going to be at every game and be the biggest fan I can be, hopefully in the media space as well.

Just grateful for him and grateful for my teammates and everybody that has kind of led me to that and knowing that Minnesota is still going to be on my chest for a long time.

Q. Tough night shooting the ball. Garcia did everything you could have asked of him. He's one of the elite players in this league. Talk a little bit about how you looked at your team and their shooting tonight. I thought he was a little out of rhythm all night long.

BEN JOHNSON: I'd agree. It's kind of ironic we were really good from the line, which we haven't been for a lot of the year.

We've just never kind of been able to in a game either have multiple guys play really well that we need to or be able to shoot it well from the floor and shoot it well from the line. It's kind of been like one or the other, and we try to survive that way. It's just so tough to do that in this league.



Today I thought we had some pretty good looks, and they didn't fall. Sometimes because of that your offense gets stagnant. We had to go away from our game plan a little bit because we needed to get something downhill. We never got a rhythm and a flow.

Credit Northwestern. They're tough, they're physical, but I just thought our pace was never one where guys just felt comfortable. It's just -- it sucks to end that way. We've proven we can play better basketball offensively, and to have just a tough night where it didn't have a flow to it is just tough.

Q. When you look where you're at in this program now, where do you see Minnesota at right now? I know it's a tough loss, but where do you see you going from this point forward?

BEN JOHNSON: Hopefully there's a chance. If we can make something here postseason-wise to give these guys, especially the seniors, an opportunity to end on a better note, that's probably goal number one because I know they want to play.

The second piece is obviously we've got to attack the portal and be able to take a step. I like some of the guys that are going to return -- whether it's Ike, whether it's Frank, some other guys that have some options they've got to think about with a chance to come back.

We've got to do a better job in the portal of just identifying guys that are going to be able to just be really impactful and thankful to have the resources now to do it, because in this league, it's so competitive and so well coached and so tough. Those resources really, really help. So now to be able to hopefully hit the ground running here with those and just do a good job finding guys that continue to elevate and can play and compete on a really high level.

Q. Last week we had the women in here, and one of the questions we asked him was Oregon, Washington, UCLA, USC. How do you feel about them coming into the Big Ten and the travel part that goes with it because everybody is going to have to travel. How did you guys see it in Minnesota?

BEN JOHNSON: I can only talk from our standpoint. We only had to go out there one time, so I can imagine having to make the trip multiple times, it's a little bit of a grind.

But to have those programs, those brands in our conference, it just elevates everything. You add those four schools with the tradition on the men's side that they have, the grind is real. So it's going to keep everything that much

more competitive.

I know Washington probably didn't have the year that they wanted to, but Danny's going to get that thing going, and it's going to be rolling, and they're going to have the resources to do it. Again, it makes things that much more competitive.

The travel part, it is what it is. You probably would have to ask those guys because they do it more than we do. It is a thing. That's definitely real. But it's good to have them in this league to make this league as competitive and as good as it can be. They really elevate everybody's play.

Q. Just talk about where you were a year ago. Completely different team almost, but at the same time, you probably felt like you were really close with that group that you had. Then with the portal it kind of fell apart a little bit, trying to put back the pieces as quickly as you did. Here we are now. I know it's been a year and it's a long road, but can you just talk about what that meant? Just talk about what that meant where you were that close last year and to kind of go through the ups and downs of this year.

BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, welcome to the state of college basketball. Just with the age and era we're in, you don't want some of that stuff when you feel like you've got some good momentum. You've obviously got some young pieces to grow and develop that are really good, excited for the opportunity that Cam got, or it's pieces that you have that left. That part is tough.

We got to continue to just build and find ways to build within the portal. Again, Ike and Frank, two pieces that we know are coming back. A couple guys got to make some decisions on what they want to do. So you take those pieces and hope those guys can learn from this year and hope the minutes got them better and the development in the spring will get them better and the summer, and then just absolutely kill it in the portal.

Just understanding that in this culture everybody's on a one-year deal, and it can be tough, especially when you're talking about that momentum piece because if you lose it, you have to hit the home run in the portal to sustain.

Again, excited for that part because we know what it takes to win at this level. We've done it. But we know the pieces, we know the talent, you understand what it takes to really be at the top and put yourself in position position. That's kind of the fun challenge, I'm appreciative of the resources now to go out there and do that, and there's no doubt in my mind that that's what we'll be doing.

I think everybody in our program, there were parts of this year where you felt really excited and really proud, and you're so close. This was a unique, special group. Then the last couple games, they had the feeling, it's only a motivator. It's only a motivator that the standard of where we're going and what we're doing, we know exactly what needs to be done.

If you're a competitive person, that's what motivates you these next couple weeks to put together a product and a team that gives yourself a true chance.

Q. Nick Martinelli obviously had another big night for Northwestern. What makes him so difficult to slow down?

BEN JOHNSON: He's really, really hard to guard. That's probably obviously an understatement. He's just got a way to get open. So like you can take away their action, but he's so smart and has such a good feel and determination, he's going to find a way to get a catch. Then once he gets a catch, he's really good in triple threat. He's got a great one-on-one game. And he's just got that unique way where he could get his shot off.

So shots that are a really high degree difficulty for most guys that aren't going to make it, he just finds a way to get that little bit of an angle and get it on the rim and his touch is really good. So when it gets on the rim, I don't know how many times he's had a back rim finish that goes in or side rim that goes in, rim, backboard, rim. It's such a soft shot.

His size, you know if you play small, you'd better double because he's getting downhill and he's getting to the paint. If you play big, you'd better hope your bigs are able to move their feet because of his first step. And they just put him in really good positions.

He does a good job with his will to just almost will the ball to go in sometimes. He's relentless with his pursuit. As an offensive rebounder, keeps second-chance points alive. I just have a ton of respect for him.

I saw him a little bit in high school, so like from where he's at now to where he was then, all credit goes to him and their staff. The kid's a made man and one of the toughest covers I've probably had in coaching, period, at like any level just because of all the different ways he can beat you.

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