

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 15, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Wisconsin Badgers

Greg Gard

A.J. Storr

Steven Crawl

Postgame Press Conference

Wisconsin - 70, Northwestern - 61

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by the University of Wisconsin. We'll start off with an opening statement from Coach Gard followed by questions for Steven and A.J.

GREG GARD: Obviously, completely different type of game than yesterday in terms of we had to really gut it out, dig in defensively after not a great start. But I thought these two guys and the guys in the locker room did a phenomenal job of buckling down and really turning the screws defensively, and they were able to make shots.

Obviously Steve hitting some big threes that kept separation. A.J., after the first few possessions, he figured out playing off two feet was really, really good and got to the rim, got to the free-throw line.

Just across the board, between foul trouble and guys a little banged up here or there, a terrific team effort. Kamari, John, Max. I mean, everybody gave us quality minutes. Just excited to be able to keep on playing.

Q. Steve, you've been really conservative in the three-point attempts you've taken this year. What's led to the increased attempts the last couple games?

STEVEN CROWL: Like I said yesterday, Coach has done a great job about being on me about being aggressive and getting them up because I'm shooting a pretty good percentage this year. And I've got to give credit to the guards. They do a great job of finding me, whether it's on the throwbacks or on the ball screens or whether I'm spotting up, they do a great job of giving me the ball in those spots.



So I've got to give credit to the coaches and the guards for sure.

Q. A.J., today not only did you have the 30 points, a career high, but you also played 35 minutes, the most you've kind of played in a month. Did you expect to kind of have a bigger role with Chucky's status and the way the game was going early on?

A.J. STORR: I just came into the game. Chucky told us before the game he wasn't playing, so that kind of motivated us all to play harder. I ended up playing 35 minutes. I didn't know, but it went great.

Q. You guys kind of dominated points in the paint today. How key was the battle inside for getting the win today?

STEVEN CROWL: I think like Coach said, it was a completely different game than yesterday where every three we shot was going in.

We knew today we would have to match their physicality, and that started, like you said, on the inside. I think for the most part we did a good job of finishing when we got in there and got to the line a little bit also.

Q. A.J., when you're having games like this, what's going on through your head?

A.J. STORR: Just to keep going till the clock hits zero. Keep going.

Q. How different did you feel the game was inside and outside without Ty Berry and Matt Nicholson?

STEVEN CROWL: Obviously they're both great players. They add a great element to their team, and it hurts losing guys like that as, if we lost some guys, it would hurt too.

Like Coach said, we just had to go out there with who we had and who they had and play a full 40 minutes, and we did that today.

Q. I saw you guys had a giant speaker before the



game. Do you do that every game? Is that a ritual? Does that motivate you guys?

A.J. STORR: I think we're going to start doing that every game now.

Q. Greg, you mentioned yesterday you felt like this team had been trending in the right direction the last week and a half or so. Is there a particular spark or something that you noticed that got this team back on the right track?

GREG GARD: I think getting healthy was a big piece of it. Obviously we have -- the stars have been in different parts of our team throughout the year. We've had Chucky have big games, Max has had big games, A.J. had one today, John had one yesterday.

I've always felt the real strength of this, the ace of this team has been their depth, and albeit just minute numbers maybe on a score sheet or a stat sheet, that spark comes from specifically Kam and John. So I think by getting those guys back, it's added an element of obviously excitement and enthusiasm to the locker room knowing that we're back full throttle with all of our pieces.

And I think we've also weathered the storm. You buckle down when things don't go your way and continue to learn and grow and stay positive and stay aggressive. I think that was the biggest thing is we -- the last two weeks, I think we've gotten much more aggressive on both ends of the floor.

Part of that is those two guys being back and having a full rotation, but I think there's -- and I feel for Chris and Northwestern because I know how they were humming with Nicholson and Berry, and you have those type of injuries, really you can plug other guys in, but it really disrupts what you spent months trying to build, even back through the summer.

Fortunately, we had guys that could step up today and help when we had some foul trouble.

Q. Greg, what would it have taken for Chucky to have to try to play today? Second part, Kamari McGee, could you address the block he had in transition, how important that was at that point in the game.

GREG GARD: Yeah, I didn't know he could jump that high, talking about Kamari. He even surprised me coming from there.

I was told Chucky tried to get it to go a little bit and tried to warm up. Then I was told about 30 minutes before the

game that he wasn't going to -- he said he couldn't go. Obviously the health of our guys is always first and foremost, so I completely leave that up to our trainers and our medical people.

Kam, it's another example of somebody stepping up and really helping. That play was huge. I'll have to watch that when I get back to the hotel.

Q. Coach, would you speak about Max Klesmit's impact in the game today and the absence of Chucky, how he was able to facilitate with seven assists and impact the game that way, please.

GREG GARD: Yeah, we've had to use him at point before, and he does a good job of -- it's a little different pace that we play with, but he does a good job of finding people.

I thought, after we made a couple of mistakes on Buie early, there was maybe one mistake we made in the second half when we didn't get up and get into the ball screen. Max, I think, and Kam and even John got a better feel because that was a pretty quick adjustment when we knew Chucky couldn't play, that somebody else was going to get the lion's share of the work on Boo.

Max, he's a warrior. He's got a huge heart, and he's gutty, and he's a competitor. That showed today.

Q. Another injury note, Tyler obviously was hurt. What was your read on that? How was he able to cut through that?

GREG GARD: I think he -- I don't know exactly what happened. He just said, hey, Coach, get me a few more breaks. We just kept talking about that, if he wanted a couple more minutes. He was kind of telling me when to pull him in and out and when he needed a break.

Like I said, it's March. If you don't have something that hurts, you haven't played hard enough. So guys continue to fight through the things that are going on, and other guys continue to step up.

Q. You alluded to it a little bit in your opening statement, but when A.J. is attacking the defense like that, especially around the rim, what type of pressure does that put, and how does it open up jump shots, not only for him, but for Steve and the team as well?

GREG GARD: It's an element that's been really good to us all year, when he gets in there and plays under control and off two feet. I think it took him a couple reps early to figure it out. It's been an ongoing process throughout the year of just continuing to help him understand, when he plays off

two feet, your percentages go up, and you get fouled more.

So fortunately for us, he learned really quick in that first half like, hey, I've got to get in here and draw contact and play off two and finish these. Obviously when you get to a situation where we have the floor spread like we do and shooters in a lot of places, it creates opportunities for him to make plays.

John does that as well, a little different way that he gets there. Obviously he was really -- you look at his numbers, he's really efficient. 10-of-16, we've seen numbers that haven't been efficient, and the reason is because he took good shots. I don't think we took very many, if any, bad shots.

Q. John Blackwell made his first career start today. Didn't really show up too much in the stat sheet but had a huge three down the stretch, kind of put the game away, and was kind of playing real hard all 40 minutes. Could you talk about his performance today.

GREG GARD: He fouled too much. That's why he didn't play as much as maybe I would have anticipated. Yeah, 24 minutes. The foul trouble kept him on the bench somewhat.

But John's not a freshman. I keep getting asked about him a lot and other media outlets about a freshman, and I was like he's grown up. He understands no moment is too big for him. He enjoys playing with his teammates.

Yesterday he was kind of front and center, front stage for us. Today he had a different role. That's the neat part about this team is that we're not dependent on one or two specific people. We have a lot of places we can go for production.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 15, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Northwestern Wildcats

Chris Collins

Boo Buie

Brooks Barnhizer

Postgame Press Conference

Wisconsin - 70, Northwestern - 61

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Northwestern University head coach Chris Collins, along with Boo Buie and Brooks Barnhizer.

CHRIS COLLINS: Obviously congratulations to Wisconsin. They were deserving of winning today. Terrific performance from Storr and Crowl. Not having Hepburn, I thought those guys really stepped up.

We got off to a great start. Boo hit some big shots. I thought our defense early in the game was really good. Then that run kind of in the middle part of the first half is when the game flipped a little bit. That 14-0 run, whatever it was.

They were able to get to the basket. They hit a couple of shots. Storr started getting going.

Then the second half, every time we tried to put pressure on them and make a run, they just answered with a big shot or a big drive.

It was two really good teams playing. They got the better of us today. It's disappointing. We came here with the idea of trying to make a run at this tournament. Unfortunately, it's a disappointing loss today, and we have to get home and get ourselves rested up and see what's next for us this weekend.

Q. For Boo, any questions about a lingering injury to your knee? I know you went and talked to the trainer. Is there any long-term scenario there?

BOO BUIE: I'm all right. I just got hit in the knee. I'm all



TIAA
BIG
MEN'S BASKETBALL
TOURNAMENT
MINNEAPOLIS 2024

right.

Q. Brooks, how would you evaluate your performance?

BROOKS BARNHIZER: I definitely didn't play a great offensive game, but I think the beauty of this game and the beauty of this March is whatever position we put ourselves, we have a chance to come back out and play again.

We have to learn from this, come back, and go get the next one.

Q. Boo, you hit seven threes today. A lot of them felt like give your team to come back in the game. Did you feel there was any extra pressure in light of Wisconsin's defense and the way they played and other guys kind of not being able to make a shot today?

BOO BUIE: No. Like Brooks said, I just think that overall as a team we weren't ourselves, like we normally are. Like you said, we have more to play for, and we just got to -- we're going to have to go back home and get ready to play better next time.

Q. Brooks, you guys were in a similar situation last year, dropping the first quarterfinal game after a double bye. How do you guys put this behind you as you head into tournament play?

BROOKS BARNHIZER: I think kind of treat it the same way as last year. We kind of looked at that game, saw what we didn't do well. We knew that we had another opportunity ahead of us. So we kind of just got better from it. That's exactly what we're going to do this year too.

Q. Boo, after that under 12 break, you only took two shots the rest of the half. What off-ball adjustments did you see Wisconsin make with their defense to kind of keep the ball out of your hands?

BOO BUIE: Pretty much all the teams have been doing it, but they've been trying to send two to the ball or just really make me pass the ball. My teammates and coaches, we



... when all is said, we're done.®

talk about it all the time, if they're going to do that, we've just got to make them pay.

It's just me being patient and hitting other guys and them getting open shots or making the extra pass. We didn't really do a great job of that tonight, but like Brooks said, man, we're looking forward to the next game. Onto the next, and looking forward to making another run next tournament.

Q. Boo, you mentioned that you guys weren't yourself today. What makes you think that? What was different about today?

BOO BUIE: If you just look at our offense, especially in the first half. I just thought we got a little stagnant. We went up 21-10, and our offense was a little bit stagnant.

We've been a really good, efficient offensive team all year. That's what I mean. That just wasn't like us. We made a couple of bonehead plays defensively. I know how capable this team is, and I just didn't feel we were ourselves tonight.

Q. For either one of you, Wisconsin hit ten threes, six of them in the second half, and a lot of them seemed like they were fairly wide open. What was it that you think led to those defensive lapses, especially in the second half around the arc?

BOO BUIE: Yeah, like I said, we weren't ourselves. We had some breakdowns, some miscommunications, and it led to open threes. And they knocked them some, so credit to them.

We just weren't right, but we're going to go back home and we're going to get right.

Q. Coach, with this being the second straight year you dropped your opening game of the Big Ten tournament, how do you once again regroup the team heading into NAAs?

CHRIS COLLINS: I think guys are excited to keep playing. There's a number of years where you lose in the Big Ten tournament game and the season might be over.

In this case -- I mean, we came here with great intentions. We really focused on -- we didn't know who we were going to play, so we had some great practices. I thought we were able to get fresher coming into the tournament.

We played a Wisconsin team that's been playing much better. Got off to a great start. Just our inability to get our other guys going. We really had Boo going early. He got

us off to such a good start.

But in order for us to win, Wisconsin is an NCAA Tournament -- we're going to be going to a tournament where everybody is really good. You need your complementary guys to be able to take some pressure off your best guy.

We just didn't knock down the shots today. I actually thought we were getting some good looks. Wisconsin played good defense on some of those, but I thought Brooks got some really good looks. I thought Nick Martinelli got the shots he normally gets. I thought Ryan Langborg got some good looks. He was in foul trouble the whole game and that really hurt us because we need his scoring.

But if you look at those three guys going 5-for-21 and 3-for-10, so 8-for-31, it's going to be really hard for us to beat an NCAA quality opponent if we go 8-for-31 with those three guys.

I thought we fought hard. We kept ourselves in the game even when it wasn't going well offensively and guys weren't scoring. We were hanging around. And then there were a couple critical possessions where in transition we got a couple of shots blocked. We ran out, got a dunk, got a shot on the other side. Give them credit. They're a good team. Obviously we had the same record this year. We're two very good teams, and they're an NCAA quality opponent, and this was a great test for us today.

Unfortunately, we weren't able to get the job done, so it's disappointing because we came here to try to win and try to advance and see if we can make a run this weekend.

Q. You guys have lost three of your last four games with no Matthew Nicholson. First, how would you assess any state of panic you might be feeling? On the secondhand, is there an update on Nicholson and his status moving forward?

CHRIS COLLINS: No panic. You look at those games that -- he got hurt in the Iowa game, which was a tough loss for us. He got hurt in the middle of that game. We went to Michigan State and, I thought, played very well, had a shot. Ryan Langborg gets a clean three that would have potentially won the game. I thought we played pretty well in kind of a rock fight type of game.

We came home and played great against Minnesota, who I think is a good team, and I thought we did some good things today. There's zero panic. We lost to a team that's going to be a 5 or 6 seed in the NCAA Tournament in a game we lose by nine, but we're winning 21-10, it's a

two-possession game in the middle of the second half.

There's zero panic. We believe we can win. We believe we're good. We believe we can compete with anybody we play against.

Last year it was a similar thing. We went out and played great against Boise. Got a good win and went out and almost beat UCLA.

Some of that stuff, depending who you play, when you play them, how they're played can be overanalyzed. We're still in a good spot. Our guys will get another week or so to get healthy. We'll either play Thursday or Friday and we'll watch some practices, and we'll be confident. We'll go into the tournament confident we can play and hopefully give ourselves a chance to advance no matter who we play.

Q. Coach, Brooks had 40 minutes, I want to say 14 rebounds as well. Do you feel his other responsibilities are kind of hurting his ability to make an offensive impact in a game like this?

CHRIS COLLINS: I don't. I just think he missed some shots. I think sometimes, when a guy misses -- he shot five threes. I thought they were all pretty wide open. They were good shots. I mean, he's a guy who's been a 40 percent three-point shooter. He just didn't make them today. It's part of the game.

He still got to the line eight times. He missed some shots around the basket he normally makes.

It's basketball. You look at the best players in the world, there's nights that great players go 3-for-15, or in the NBA sometimes, it's 6-for-25 or things like that. It happens. You don't make shots all the time.

He's played those minutes all year, guys. It's not -- we had a week off. We hadn't played since last Saturday. He's fine. You look at Wisconsin's minutes, Storr played 35, Klesmit played 35, Crowl played 32. Guys can play heavy minutes because there's long timeouts. Guys are in condition to play those kind of minutes.

He just had a tough night shooting the ball, and I want him to stay confident, same thing with Nick, same thing with Ryan. They've been great players for us all year long. It just was a night that collectively we couldn't get any of those three guys going, which was disappointing because Boo was amazing. Boo was, it's kind of fitting maybe his last Big Ten game he ever plays, the way he played like that on this stage, 29 points, 7 threes. He kind of did everything in his power to keep us in it, and we just weren't able to get the other guys going this afternoon.

Q. I'm going to try not to be too leading here. I was thinking watching Braden Smith limp off the court, it's a game Purdue doesn't need. You guys, you've got injuries. You've got starters playing almost 40 minutes. How much does this tournament even matter for you in the scheme of things? Is it not the worst thing to go home after one game?

CHRIS COLLINS: Look, in hindsight it's not the worst thing. The worst thing would probably be to play three games and lose in the championship because you get wiped out and then you've got to fly home and figure out who you're playing.

That being said, as a competitor, you don't view it that way. You come in -- I mean, we were really excited, really ready to play. We came here. We felt we had a great chance not being able to play until Friday.

Then when you lose a game, you kind of say, okay, let's get home. Let's dust ourselves off. Let's get back to the drawing board. We're still in a good spot. We were able to get through the game. The guys we do have -- you know, Ty's out. I apologize I didn't answer your question on that. No new update on Matt.

But we'll get ourselves ready. Like I told the guys, it's the one thing that's a positive is you can kind of learn from playing an opponent like today in a tournament environment, and you can kind of go home and say, okay, there are no more do-overs now. It's a one-and-done situation. We've got to get it right. We've got to be at our best.

Obviously the margin for error for us is very slim. When you lose some key guys, two starters, you can still win. Doesn't mean we can't win, but it makes the margin for error a little bit slimmer, with our defense, with our rebounding, with our turnovers, things of that nature that we have to really shore up before we head to next weekend.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports