

# Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

## Penn State Nittany Lions

**Mike Rhoades**

**Zach Hicks**

**Ace Baldwin Jr.**

Postgame Press Conference



State - 66, Michigan - 57

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Penn State head coach Mike Rhoades, along with Zach Hicks and Ace Baldwin Jr. We'll start off with an opening statement from Coach Rhoades.

MIKE RHOADES: Just proud of our guys today. I thought we had a good week preparing for the tournament. We knew this would be -- get ourselves going and get into this game.

Credit to Michigan. I thought they had a hard-fought game and they were ready to go.

I thought Ace settled us down as we went along there, and Zach made some big plays to get us going and made some shots. I thought a bunch of guys contributed in different ways, and it didn't always come up on the stat sheet.

This time of year, it doesn't always have to be pretty, but you've got to stick together. Just like how we handled some adversity. Win the game and get to the next one, and that's what they did today. I thought it was a great team effort.

**Q. Zach, things have sort of clicked for you since early February. What would you say the change has been, or what is it about your game that you've sort of found now?**

ZACH HICKS: I don't think there's been much changes. Every shooter goes in a slump. Coach always tells me shoot the ball with confidence. So that's one thing that never left me. I started hitting toward February, and I'm just riding the wave right now.

**Q. Ace, your experience in VCU in the tournament over the past couple of seasons, how has that translated to a bigger stage like the Big Ten tournament and hopefully into the March Madness tournament this season?**

ACE BALDWIN JR.: I would just say we've got to take it a game at a time. That's what I've got to say.

**Q. Ace, defensively, what was the key for you guys tonight? I guess kind of big picture with your press, how has that been so effective for you guys this season?**

ACE BALDWIN JR.: The game plan was just to cut off the head of the snake, which was Doug, and I think we did a pretty good job of it. I think a lot of teams, they don't want to dribble against our press. So I think that will keep working for us.

**Q. Ace, you're one of the top minutes played guys in the entire country, and now you're going to have to play back-to-back days. How do you mentally and physically prepare your body to get ready for tomorrow?**

ACE BALDWIN JR.: Just get a little bit of treatment, ice my legs, and we'll be right back in tomorrow.

MIKE RHOADES: We took him out today. He should be well rested. (Laughter).

**Q. Zach, anything specific, when you were shooting the ball today, anything about the flow of the game or how you felt specifically that made you so successful today?**

ZACH HICKS: As a shooter, once you see that first one drop, it's just like the basket gets super big. I felt that was the main thing today.

**Q. Zach, you've had success against Indiana this season. Is there anything to be said for the success that you've had as you play them again? Does that**



**give you confidence? How does that kind of affect your mentality?**

ZACH HICKS: We're just going to approach it like every other game. They're a good team. Going to try to do what we did the first two times and come out with another win and keep advancing.

**Q. Mike, there have been a couple different guys this year, that you've really gotten a lot out of. Q and Zach are good examples. What do you think has helped them develop past the player they were at the start of the year?**

MIKE RHOADES: Number one is keep demanding them to get better. Q is in his fifth year, and Zach three years now in college, and they've been successful.

But there's always more to all of us. That's just sort of the way we do things. If you can get a little bit better every week during the season, you get better late in the season, it helps you right around now.

I think you just demand them to get better all the time. We talk about that every day. It's a daily approach from the way we play as a team and what you do after practice and getting extra reps up.

I told Zach, I said, he's a heck of a shooter, but I think you're a good rebounder because you have a nose for the ball, and I really demanded him to go rebound this year. He's done that. He never played defense until he got here this year, and his defense has improved.

I think one of the reasons he didn't shoot the ball so well early in the year was he was playing so hard on defense and trying to do what he wanted. It wasn't familiar to him. He was tired and fighting through fatigue. He's learned to battle through fatigue.

Even with Ace, just continue to read ball screens better and better, and run your team better and better, even though he's been doing it for a long time. Just always demanding these guys.

Q, this is the best he's moved in his career. We've asked him to play a different style than he's ever done. He's been great at it. He's been getting better and better at it. The second half of the year he's really stepped up, and he's made big plays for us that he maybe didn't have earlier in the year.

Just always demanding them to get better. That's one thing as a coaching staff, we say work them hard, love them harder, and try to make them better.

**Q. Since Indiana played you guys at the BJC they haven't lost. How do you think they are planning on attacking you guys differently?**

MIKE RHOADES: I think, when you play a team multiple times, there's always changes, counters to things you do and all that. That's basketball. We'll do some things differently as well.

We're not going to change, I mean, with the pieces we have and where we're at. There's not a lot of things we can just change on the fly. But you make a couple of tweaks here and there to help your team.

I think our style of play at this time of the year really helps us because, if you turn people over late in the year and you capitalize on it, it's tough to battle that stuff and compete against that.

They're playing really well. Xavier is back. They've got another ball handler. But it's that time of the year, man. You've got to double knot the shoes and see what happens.

**Q. Just wanted to say congrats on your first Big Ten win. When looking at your big rotation, we saw Meech early on in the game. He looked pretty good early on. Eventually Leo came in and played some big minutes in the second half. Q, I saw you talking to him a lot. Can you just explain your thought process on getting all three of them in at certain times of the game and what that's going to look like throughout the tournament.**

MIKE RHOADES: Yeah, I want to play a lot of guys because you can play so hard, and our guys get to a point where they play as hard as they possibly can and know, if they come out, they know they're going to go back in. Always my philosophy. I think it creates great morale in your team and your program.

Meech knows he's going in, he can help the team win, and he did that today. Of course Leo and Q have been doing that all year long. So I'm always going to play a lot of guys and throw them in the fire.

But be impactful. Impact your team. Don't get in the way of winning. Impact your team to win. So we're always going to shuffle guys like that.

You're not getting demoted when you come out after two or three minutes because you're going to go back in there and try to outwork the other team who might not do that. So that's just sort of our approach.

**Q. With Indiana you mentioned Xavier Johnson. What have you noticed that's different with them when he's in the lineup?**

MIKE RHOADES: He's a vet. He's a vet, and he's had a lot of success in his college career. I watched him from high school all the way through, and he's a very talented player. There's a calming presence when he's out there with his teammates. You saw that the last few games. He's sure of himself, and I think he gives confidence to his teammates that way. So we'll have our hands full.

**Q. Do you have an update on Meech, just how he's doing?**

MIKE RHOADES: Yeah, he just tweaked his back. We'll see. That's why we brought our docs with us.

**Q. Coach, what do you say to your players to kind of invoke like, hey, you have the green light, go ahead and play your style of game, shoot that shot, like Zach Hicks did tonight?**

MIKE RHOADES: It's just what we do. I hate to answer it like that. It's just what we do. We shoot the ball when you're open. You work on it. If you want the neon green light like Zach, you'd better be in the gym all summer long. You'd better come back late at night and shoot.

We've got like 15 managers and 5 GAs, and their number one job is to rebound for these guys. There's no excuse not to get in the gym and work on your game. When Coach tells you you've got the green light, it all works together, that part of it.

The other part of it is it's a player's game, it's not a coach's game. When guys play with great freedom and confidence and know they don't have to look over their shoulder if they miss a shot or make a mistake, are they going to get pulled? It gives guys great confidence. And guys want to get better too because they're going to have great opportunity and freedom to go be the player they dreamed about and want to be.

I've always believed in that. I played for a coach like that. It's a fun way to play. It's a confident way to play. And I think later in your career, when you know you have the green light, you keep working on your game. You don't look at the end. You think I can keep going and keep getting better. So the neon green light is important at Penn State.

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## Michigan Wolverines

## Juwan Howard

## Nimari Burnett

## Terrance Williams II

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Penn State - 66, Michigan - 57

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by University of Michigan head coach Juwan Howard, along with Terrance Williams II and Nimari Burnett. We'll start with an opening statement.

JUWAN HOWARD: I would like to give Penn State coaching staff and players the credit they deserve. They came out with a game intensity on the defensive end. Looking back to the first half with 11 turnovers they caused. They were very truly disruptive.

Overall I give our guys credit as well for how we defended on the defensive end, bringing that fight we prepared for leading up to this evening.

Unfortunately, we did not come out on the winning side, but I'm proud of every player that has been a part of this program this season, dealing with the adversity we dealt with, to be able to come out each and every night and give everything that we've asked.

With that being said, we'll open up to questions for our players.

**Q. Terrance, your mid-range game was working for you all night. Did you happen to feel a little bit of a hot streak, maybe a green light from Coach Howard?**

TERRANCE WILLIAMS II: Yeah, he drew up a play for me when I got the and one mid-range, but prior to that I hit a couple. Like you said, I was just feeling it today in the mid-range area because that's what they were giving me. They were running me off the line.



I was just going to take what the defense gave me, and it happened to be the mid-range today, and they were falling.

**Q. Dug McDaniel was talking about how it feels like you guys have been out of sync since after the first couple of games of the season. I'm curious if you guys could comment on that and just assess kind of what went wrong over the last third of the season.**

NIMARI BURNETT: I remember losing to Long Beach State earlier in the year, and I think winning that game kind of would have changed things. But it's how the season went throughout the time. Obviously there's some things that we needed to fix, and it was a bunch of things that we could have fixed along the way.

Overall, it was just tough to go through that as a team, go through that adversity, like Coach talked about. Overall it was just a tough season for sure.

**Q. Terrance, Tarris and Will had their arms around you during that last timeout. Can you take us through the emotions and the game as a whole in that moment.**

TERRANCE WILLIAMS II: They were hugging me and saying, thanks for everything. I spent three years with Will, two with T. Reed, and they were thanking me for everything I've done for them and helping them get better each day. It really hit home for me that I had that effect on people because I didn't know I had that effect on people until they told me.

It was a lot of emotions for me, just taking it all, these four years I've put on the maize and blue.

**Q. What is this team's culture, and what is this team's MO? What is your identity of this program?**

NIMARI BURNETT: I believe the culture is to come in every day and put in maximum effort, doing it as a team, as a group. It's really family oriented.

Even though this season didn't go the way we wanted it to, we all were bought in. I kind of said the other day it sucks, but this group has been connected. It's the most



connected eight and whatever how many losses team I've ever been a part of. I don't regret any time spent with these guys. They're like brothers to me.

It sucks, and we all went through it together. I feel like on the other side of it we'll become stronger men with higher character because of it.

TERRANCE WILLIAMS II: Coach always talk about the culture being a family. I feel that's where we were this year. You probably don't see that on the court, but I feel like we were a family off the court.

We were all in. We were disciplined each day. We had accountability each day in practice. Like I said, you don't see it, but behind closed doors, I feel like our culture is good. I feel like Coach Howard is doing a good job, and he's going to continue to do a good job to lead us young men to be better on the court and off the court.

**Q. You guys were down 11 at halftime, but came out really strong in the second half. What kind of was said at halftime? What do you think helped get that energy for you guys?**

NIMARI BURNETT: I just think in the first half we had a slow offensive -- just a slow offensive first half. Mixing that we weren't getting some stops beginning of the second half like we were getting in the first half, with our offensive game flowing and guys making shots.

It was a game of the ball didn't go in the first half, and it's due now. You're due for your next one. So T. Will came up and hit some big shots, T. Reed was working in the paint. Dug started to get things going. So that's kind of what got us going in the beginning of the second half.

**Q. Juwan, I know you were asked this maybe six weeks ago, but I was wondering do you have the same answer: Do you still intend and want to coach this team next season?**

JUWAN HOWARD: My answer hasn't changed.

**Q. Have you had any conversations with Warde Manuel or any other Michigan administrators about the future?**

JUWAN HOWARD: No, I have not. We just played the game. There are a lot of emotions right now at this moment for players and coaches. We did not want to lose this game tonight, but it so happens that's what happened.

We'll go back home and sit down and meet, me and players. Then I'm sure the athletic department will want to

sit down and talk. I'm looking forward to having those type of conversations.

**Q. With respect to how quickly this just ended and those conversations, I guess what would your pitch be to continue on? Is it the success that you've had, or is it maybe since there has not been success in recent years, you have a plan to change things?**

JUWAN HOWARD: Well, I say this out of respect. I didn't know I was being interviewed at this time. When you say the word "pitch" because then that means I of course have to be able to pitch what you had touched on.

At this time, man, we lost a tough game. This is a heart breaker for me and my entire staff, as well as players. So it's going to be tough to sleep tonight for all of us.

**Q. Juwan, are you confident that this can get turned around, that you can turn this around, that you still have the pieces in place to turn it around?**

JUWAN HOWARD: There are going to be a lot of decisions made when the season ends -- obviously the season just ended. We'll regroup tomorrow, and we will sit down and talk as a staff on our needs, our wants. At the same time, we're going to do a great job -- I trust we will do a great job in executing that plan.

**Q. I know you've been asked this a million times too, but you still fully health-wise and everything else want to be back, plan to be back?**

JUWAN HOWARD: Health-wise, just two weeks ago I started to turn the corner and started to feel a lot better. My mobility, getting out of bed improved. Sleep improved. My conditioning level as I was going through -- and I still go through rehab three days a week -- has improved. My health is truly improving day in and day out.

I look forward to coaching next year.

**Q. Warde Manuel quoted effort a lot this year from your team when discussing your future. Nimari Burnett just quoted the effort of this team. At what point does effort turn into tangible efforts?**

JUWAN HOWARD: When you think back to some of the adversity we faced starting with injuries -- not making excuses, but this is reality. You look at injuries to key guys. This was touched on just recently, the last four weeks of our season losing Olivier, one of our best players on our team.

You look at the time when we lost, not having our point

guard. And as we were clawing and scrapping, not making excuses during that process, understanding, yes, those situations that happened, we have to take ownership of it and grow with it.

Then you look at the fact that with the change of a new roster, you lose one of your best players to the transfer portal, that's Hunter Dickinson. Then you also lose two NBA players, first round picks, one being a lottery pick. The other one just one pick off being in the lottery.

It's challenging of course building a roster, you have to reinvent yourself. Like I said before, not making any excuses for it, and sure enough, we did not. At the same time, you don't plan on the adversity that we faced. You're hoping that you have a little luck within this sport because truly luck plays a major role.

For us, we didn't have that luck. Overall, I really appreciate our guys night in and night out, every time that we pushed them to get uncomfortable, they allowed us to and accepted it.

Then at the same time, we learned a lot from them and who they are. You heard it from our two players that was here earlier. They talked about being all in because of our culture, and our culture, that's what we have. We've instilled a culture since day one, since I've been a head coach here, and we will not waver from it, no matter what college basketball and the rules with college basketball has thrown at us. We will stick to the culture because we understand what works.

We're going to, like I said earlier, regroup when I get back, and we're going to figure out what's best for this program moving forward.

**Q. Coach, first of all, we're praying for you that your health will improve.**

JUWAN HOWARD: Thank you, brother. I appreciate that.

**Q. There's three Black coaches in this conference and throughout the season. Each one of you has been put on a hot seat by the white media. I'm hoping that you survive this because we know Black coaches sometimes don't. But can you speak on just the fact that the three of you are doing the job that you've been hired to do, representing as coaches. There was Black kids in the stands today that got to see you coach and will see the other two Black coaches during this tournament. Can you just speak on that.**

JUWAN HOWARD: Well, I got into coaching because I remember how my coaches impacted me as I grew. When

I touched -- let's call it what it is. When I first touched campus on the University of Michigan, how Steve Fisher and his staff helped me in so many ways to become a graduate student at one of the prestigious universities, speaking of the University of Michigan.

Coming as a kid from the inner city, being the first in my family to receive my degree. Promising my grandmother, no matter what, my goal is to make it to the NBA and take care of our family, but I promise you I'm going to get my education to inspire my family members and also others that come from our community that they can do the same thing.

Now fast track, this is, I've always said to you guys, a dream job to be able to impact these young men, to encourage them, to grow with them, to teach them how to come from a young man to a man during some of these uncomfortable times in our society.

I relish the fact that, yeah, there are always going to be moments where everyone's entitled to their opinion. I'm not going to please everyone. But I'm going to, of course, roll up my sleeves and be inspired to work hard every day to make sure that I'm responsible to do a job to help our university be proud of a winning culture. We're going to get back to that, and that's my goal, and I'm going to stick to it.

There have been coaches that have really inspired me to go out and do something special during this college game, and I look back to the John Thompsons of the world. I also am inspired by the Mike Jarvis of the world and many others.

**Q. Kind of picking up on your answer from the question before, whether you win one game or 30 games, there are always moments that every coach remembers most fondly about each team. What will be those moments that you'll remember about this group?**

JUWAN HOWARD: Yeah, great question. I would say on how our young men took on adversity during some uncomfortable moments and how they, of course, rallied together during that.

We could have easily had a team that separated themselves, because it is truly uncomfortable when you have a plan of you want to be dancing in March. You want to also be the last team standing. And when you don't achieve those goals, that's when tough adversity hits.

With our group, I've seen how the adversity where we've rallied behind one another. This started from the beginning when I went out with my injury. My players calling on me, checking on me in the hospital, sending me wonderful text

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

messages. My staff all hands on deck stepping up to help prepare our team every day in practice, at the same time sending me flowers, their families checking on me, making sure that my health is good.

Then we could have easily just said, you know, this is not for us. But everything you want is on the other side of hard. I really believe that this has been a learning year, but it's been a year that we've all really joined together. That's when family has been tested, and I feel family has stepped up and supported one another when family needed one another.

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