

Big Ten Conference Basketball Media Days

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Tom Crean

Indiana

TOM CREAN: First and foremost, it's great to be in this area. Love this area for a lot of reasons, and the fact that the Big Ten is a huge part of it now with the success that Maryland has had over the many years that made them such attractive part of adding them to the Big Ten means that much more. It's a great area to visit. Certainly a great area to recruit, and it's going to be a lot of fun to play the conference tournament here.

The success Maryland has had and is having, continues to have a lot to do with things like that. I think Mark is one of the best coaches in the country. Not only in the Big Ten, but in the country. I think their team continues to get better and better with his leadership and the way that they play. I think he's been a fantastic addition to this league.

Before we get into our team, I'd like to welcome on behalf of Indiana, too, Steve Pikiell to the Big Ten. We competed against him at Stony Brook, and an outstanding coach. I mean, they made a great hire when they hired him. His teams are tough, hard-nosed, competitive. Don't beat themselves. And over a period of time as he gets to put his stamp on that team, that will happen. Then one guy that I think was in so many close games last year, so many games that could have gone either way, including two with us, is Richard Pitino. And I think he's on the cusp of getting that team to where he wants it to be, playing the style of play that they want. Again, you need -- to have a great league, you've got to have everybody from top to bottom doing their very best. I don't know a lot of people talking about Richard's team, but there are a lot of us thinking about it, I know we are, in the realm of how much better they're getting.

As far as us, we lost a lot of guys, obviously, that were very successful for us over a period of time. And we had a lot of injuries that we had to deal with this past summer. We didn't play five-on-five as a group until our second or third practice. Third practice, I think it was, here this year because we've had so many guys that were missing. So I hadn't seen our guys play five-on-five since the North Carolina game. So we've started to do more of that. I think in our realm right now, we're trying to make sure that we're learning to compete and concentrate through fatigue, especially over the last couple days. Trying to make it a



strenuous affair fatigue-wise, where they've got to learn to really not only concentrate for themselves, but build a responsibility for each other.

Everybody asks about the leadership around our place and what we're going to do without Yogi. And I don't know if you replace a guy like Yogi and replace what we lost with Troy Williams, Max Bielfeldt and Nick Zeisloft with one guy. If there was one guy that was going to be that guy, it would probably be Collin Hartman because of his experience, but he has to do that from the sideline now. So what we have to get is responsibility for one another. It sounds kind of trite and simple, but the more you can do that for each other when you're tired and fatigued and take that responsibility to help each other get through things, then all of a sudden, your leadership starts to take shape because then you're making the game easier for each other.

If our team had one main strength last year, it was that they made the game easier for each other. We got better defensively. We made the game so much more simple for each other on offense because of the way the ball moved, and we've got to be able to do that. So we're trying to get those things accomplished right now defensively. We're trying to understand what level of ball pressure we can play. We haven't started to put our pressures in yet. But we want to pressure the ball in the half court to three-quarter court area. We want to do a great job of protecting and supporting each other, and that's where the communication comes in. Because older teams have a hard time understanding how important it is to communicate with each other. Young teams really have no idea.

Even though we have some experienced guys, they are now going to have to be those experienced guys in the realm of taking real control of the team for one another.

So that, along with building a physical and mental toughness that we're going to need to play a fast-paced style of play and a hard-nosed defensive team, is what we're after. I love our team's spirit. I love their energy. We're nowhere near healthy enough, which means we're not even close to having a real understanding of where we can be as a team, but it's a great team to be with every day. And we're trying to run our own race, and I think that's the most important thing that these

guys can understand is that you don't pick up from where you left off, you build on where you were at. It's constantly a new challenge every day to get that understood, but we're definitely working at it.

Q. Can you talk about Thomas Bryant's decision to come back, and in terms of the maturity that showed as well as the fact that he and guys like Melo Trimble and Swanigan are back in the league after those two flirting with the NBA?

TOM CREAN: Well, when it comes to running your own race, Thomas is a great example of that, because he had to do what was absolutely going to be best for his long-term career, and I don't think he made a short-term decision. He made a long-term decision. You can talk to him more in depth about it. But it really wasn't that hard of a decision for him. He's a very honest person in what he needs to get better at. He understands how far he's come. But I think he's one of those rare kids that really, really gets how much better he can get. I think he's enjoying himself. He's a humble person. He's got a great level of energy, and he's very young. He just turned 19 two months ago. But bottom line is he's really got an old soul. He really does. He's great with his teammates, loves the gym, and really, really wants to have a long-term career. And there's really no reason, when he leaves Indiana, that he shouldn't have an extremely long career at the next level.

Q. You mentioned Yogi and replacing him from a leadership standpoint. But can you tell us how the first couple of weeks of finding a new point guard and how that competition has been going?

TOM CREAN: Well, it's not as much about that to me. The point guard is going to be the guy that, after the made basket, gets the ball on the break and can make the best decisions, advance it with the dribble or the pass, can score at the rim, score in a pull-up situation, hit a three, get into a ball screen, those type of things. Then everything else has got to be free flowing so that the decision-making process for us is really on that break.

After missed baskets, it's really the majority of the guys that we have should be able to bust out with the ball. That's why we work so hard at developing their skills and treating the forwards just like the guards when we do our breakdown work.

But we'll be a little different offensively. I think the most important thing is not to find that one or two guys that are just going to set it up and control the tempo, but have a team of guys that understand how to make the game easier. Again, it's building skill. Juwan Morgan at the end of the year when Rob Johnson was our back-up point guard and as a 6'8" freshman. Now he's

not been healthy enough to do anything of live contact yet. We're probably a week to two weeks away from that.

But, really, with the three juniors that we have in Josh Newkirk, James Blackmon, Rob Johnson, and the two freshmen we have in Curtis Jones and Devonte Green, it's a matter of having the ball moving and really making the reads and decisions for one another that is so important. Build confidence in their own games. We put very few plays in. We put very, very little offense in other than concepts, and spent much more time on defense this year and getting that acclimated with the commitment level you have to have to the talk and to the help. So that's going to take some time for us. But I haven't been displeased with anybody. Everybody's had certain days where they've been really good, and no one has had a day where they've not been good.

Q. I was wondering, you have Kansas and North Carolina in your schedule in the first few weeks. Can you tell us a little bit about what that's going to tell you about your team and how that will prepare you for the Big Ten season?

TOM CREAN: That's very poor scheduling. I mean, there is no question about that. Especially the Kansas game. But, no, in all honesty, that's something everybody's looking forward to. Then you throw in what we have in December with Louisville and Butler. I mean, our non-conference schedule is going to be ridiculously challenging for this team. But that's okay. Because so is the league. And the more experiences that we can get, we're going to go against one of the hardest-nosed, toughest-minded, best-coached teams in the country right off the bat in Hawaii, and really, what it does is it just kind of increases your urgency a little bit in the non-season. And there's not a day that goes by that I don't reference one of those two teams at least four or five times in something that we're doing. We haven't started to prepare for them per se yet, but it will be a great challenge for us. Physicality-wise, mental toughness-wise, we've got to do a lot in a short period of time to get ready for games like that.