

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - North Dakota State vs Michigan State

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Buffalo, New York, USA

KeyBank Center

North Dakota State Bison Coach David Richman Trevian Carson Damari Wheeler-Thomas

Media Conference

Michigan State 92, North Dakota State 67

DAVID RICHMAN: Obviously the first thing that comes to mind is just gratitude. I appreciate the NCAA. This is a first-class event, and for the experience that our student-athletes got, it's incredible. The people of Buffalo, how they run things, it's great.

Most importantly, my appreciation is for these two and 14 other guys, validating a process. What we do is extremely challenging, and we push these guys extremely, extremely hard, and they validated that. They validated that when you work hard and you have fun and you compete and you listen and you serve on a daily basis, great things can happen.

I'm extremely grateful for these two and the rest of our group for validating a process that's extremely tough.

No shame in us. This wasn't what we expected, this wasn't what we wanted, but we're extremely proud of this stage that we got on and have expectations that we'll be back very soon.

Q. Damari, to see that size on film is one thing. What was it like to see it in person on the court?

DAMARI WHEELER-THOMAS: Pretty much what we expected. A couple of our finishes were not physical like we needed them to be, and that's why they ended up the way they did.

Q. You guys shot 6 for 25 from three today. How



much can you point to that as one of the reasons you lost this game?

DAVID RICHMAN: They played a really good ballclub that's extremely well-coached. There are some size and physicality, athleticism things that we don't see on a regular basis that are really hard to simulate. Shooting is one part of the game. It wasn't the part that cost us.

It would have been nicer to make some shots, absolutely.

Q. Trevian, you guys got off to a tough start shooting threes, and Coach Izzo mentioned he thought you guys didn't play as well as you probably wanted to, and part of it was not making shots. Was that just their defense that was making it tough on you to make threes and shoot it?

TREVIAN CARSON: No, I don't think so. We were getting what we wanted, we just wasn't capitalizing on the opportunities we got.

Q. Damari, describe your second half. Looked like you were a little more assertive out there.

DAMARI WHEELER-THOMAS: Yeah, really was the same thing as the first. Just got more in a little flow through the second half. And wish we started out like that. But we picked it up and we had fight in the second half, and that's what we needed from the jump.

Q. Trevian, how tough was it, they had the pick-and-roll going with their size, Cooper was tough inside, then they had the breakouts in the transition that David talked about being a problem possibly for you guys. Talk about the toughness of stopping them defensively.

TREVIAN CARSON: I mean, it wasn't really the toughest for us. We were late on a lot of rotations. The pace was something that we're not really used to, but for the most part I thought we did an all right job.

Q. Same thing I asked these guys about the physicality difference. Once you see it in person, is it different in person?



DAVID RICHMAN: Yeah, it's different. It is. You can see it on tape, and it's one thing you can try to simulate with our scout team and all those things, but it's different. This is a high major program. It showed. Their speed, their physicality, their length, it's a challenge.

The more we saw it, obviously, the second half was a little bit of tell to that, the more comfortable you get, the more you understand it, the more you're okay. We're capable of these things.

But in a one-off like this, it just takes -- it's too quick. It just happens too quick.

Q. Wonderful season. So what does it say about the direction of this program getting back to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2019?

DAVID RICHMAN: Yeah, thank you. Appreciate the love for mid majors. Yeah, it's 2019 and then 2020 we qualified, and to be back here, we're extremely proud. That's what I talked about. This group is -- like I said, this group validated a process. What this program is about, the process that we're going to attack every day, we're capable of doing things like this.

But I also have aspirations of leading this group beyond this and winning a game, winning multiple games in the NCAA Tournament. I think this shed some light on where we're at and what we need to do moving forward.

Q. I don't know how much of a difference it made, but you had Treyson and Markhi both got two fairly quick fouls and you had to sit them for a bit. Did that add to the issues of trying to stop their size a little bit?

DAVID RICHMAN: Yeah, that certainly didn't help, but part of our game plan was to play some smaller lineups to see if we could get some of their big guys out and create some driving lines. And some of the things you did see from us in the back half of the first half and a little bit more in the second half, we were able to open some things up.

But again, shooting, foul trouble, you know, their size -- there's a culmination of a bunch of things that led to the result.

Q. What's the difference, if you remember back to the Oklahoma win, what was the difference between that game and this game?

DAVID RICHMAN: You know, off the top of my head, I can't tell you exactly. I would tell you this: Oklahoma is different than Michigan State. We're a different team. I don't have that exact answer for you right now.

Q. When you put together a game plan against a team like this, do you have a certain way that you're saying, if we're going to win this game, we're going to have to do this, this and this? When you watch film and you can see what's going on, is there a certain plan? Did you see it not happening at a certain point?

DAVID RICHMAN: Well, at the end of the day, we got here and we got to the NCAA Tournament doing us, so that's going to be a big part of what we do. We tweaked some ball screen coverages immediately going into the game and tried to do some things to slow down Fears differently than we had done the entire year.

But then we also -- we talk about it as a staff, like, last ditch, what do we need to do, what kind of adjustments can we make. Part of that was playing small, some defensive adjustments.

At the end of the day, we can sit here and spin this any way; Michigan State was clearly the better basketball team today.

Q. Were there any specific strong points you saw tonight that you're trying to build into future years?

DAVID RICHMAN: Yeah, it's the fight. Damari mentioned it. In a lot of ways, we were down, what, 26 or something like that and cut it to 17. That's what I've come to expect from this group. It's the program I wanted to be defined by tough and together, and you saw some of those things.

The problem is we went against a program that has a lot of toughness and togetherness as well. But extremely proud of the fight from our group and playing the full 40 minutes.

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