

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Howard vs Michigan

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Buffalo, New York, USA

KeyBank Center

Michigan Wolverines

Coach Dusty May

Morez Johnson Jr.

Roddy Gayle Jr.

Media Conference

Michigan 101, Howard 80

DUSTY MAY: I want to begin by congratulating Howard on a fantastic season. Sometimes when you scout an opponent, it's not easy on the eyes, but watching those guys, they're well-coached. They play well together. They have great passion and life and spirit to them. And obviously that's a tribute to their university, to their athletic department, and everyone that they represent.

What a great story, but happy with our guys. We stayed the course. We thought we took a haymaker from them in the first half, and our guys never played scared. They never played tight. They just continued to get to the next possession and found a way to separate in the second half.

Q. Morez, Coach talked about the haymaker, you didn't get flustered. What was that like and how important was it to do that in an opening round game, to set you up moving forward?

MOREZ JOHNSON JR.: It's very important for us not to get too high or too low in a game like this. Every team is going to make their runs. We've just got to stay poised and do what we do and keep playing.

Q. Roddy, how was it for you just to be back here and have a great performance as well?

RODDY GAYLE JR.: It means a lot, especially seeing behind our bench the type of love and support that came to tonight's game. Obviously my first time playing in front of many of those people, family and friends, of course. It was



just a great feeling to be here and play hard with my teammates.

Q. I know I asked you about a version of this question yesterday, but what was it like for you tonight when you first stepped out onto the floor? Did you look into the stands and see your family and friends?

RODDY GAYLE JR.: I tried my hardest to not look in that direction, just because I know I'm focused on the game plan and playing hard each and every possession with my teammates, but at the end of the day, when you kind of hear the crowd erupt, just all the nerves and the stresses kind of lift away, and you just play free.

Q. For Morez, big double-double after some frustrating moments against Purdue. What was that like? What was the week like trying to get your game ramped up inside?

MOREZ JOHNSON JR.: Just pretty much learning from it and moving on from it. The game is over and we've got to focus on now. Can't hang our heads about it. Of course we wanted to win, but we got to move on and focus on the tournament now.

Q. At halftime was -- perimeter shooting was incredible. Did you think they were going to cool off one of these moments? What was the approach defensively at halftime?

MOREZ JOHNSON JR.: We had to pick it up. We had to guard the three-point line better, force turnovers and get some reflections and stuff.

Q. Roddy, being that you're in Niagara Falls, talk about the people that paved the way for you, people you looked up to to get to this moment?

RODDY GAYLE JR.: Obviously being from Niagara Falls, Jonny Flynn and Paul Harris are just some names that come to mind immediately, just like watching those Syracuse games as a kid and just seeing the highlight reel that came from nothing, small town, small community, but everybody showed up.

And just the way they played the game was just infectious



and just kind of how I implement my game, as well, just playing with a relentless energy.

Q. Roddy, it's no secret that you sort of elevate your game play in March. Last season it was the same thing and tonight another big performance. What is it about postseason play that really forces you to elevate your game to the next level?

RODDY GAYLE JR.: I just think just desperation. Win or lose, lose you go home. Obviously being my senior year, my goal is just to make it a game and win. That's every one of our goals meeting together in the summertime. I would say there's no change. I just look at it as a new season, no stats, no percentages, just go out there and play free and play hard for each other.

Q. Roddy, you shot often early. Was that intentional because you were at home, or did the game come to you? And for Morez, I think you were guarding 34, Bryce Harris, a lot. What was he good at, and what did you try to limit him from doing?

RODDY GAYLE JR.: I would just say I just kind of took what the game gave me. I think one of the beauty about playing for Michigan, we have Aday and Elliot, and they really put me in great position to be successful, and I was able to knock down shots tonight.

Especially on my cuts, I felt like Aday, when he got the ball, especially in high post, being able to cut, I feel like if I just cut hard, he'll be able to find me. Especially with Elliot, he drive and creates and he gets in the paint, just being able to move without the ball, create space. And the game of basketball just rewarded me tonight.

MOREZ JOHNSON JR.: 34 is a good basketball player. He can pretty much do everything. He can dribble, pass, capable shooter and stuff like that. Just make things difficult for him, pressure the ball.

Q. Morez, coming out of halftime, they hit the buzzer beater, and they have a lot of energy, but Michigan started scoring 10 on their first 11 possessions, and you scored 14 of those points. What was the mentality heading out of the locker room into halftime, and what was going on in your head?

MOREZ JOHNSON JR.: In the locker room we talked about getting stops, playing our basketball, knowing that they hit that big shot going into halftime. We can't hang our heads on it. We've got to keep playing basketball. I don't know, it was just coming to me. My teammates were putting me in the right spots.

Q. Tonight was your second double-digit game since January. So what about this game and the Michigan State game at the end of the regular season allowed you to figure out what you were doing in those two games?

RODDY GAYLE JR.: I just think those two games specifically, my teammates put me in great positions to be successful. Just playing hard. Obviously it being the tournament, there's no next game if we lose. So just leaving it all out, emptying the tank, and if I play hard, I play too hard and I need a setup, I call for a setup.

Q. Roddy, Okojie did such a good job for them in their first game, 23 points. I think you and Nimari and Yax had switched off on him and really limited him today. Was there something you were doing that was especially effective? And were you guys aware of Duke almost getting upset today? Was that in your heads at all? Did you have to push it out?

RODDY GAYLE JR.: I would say he's a very good player, I think. Just making him uncomfortable. I know the second half we kind of forced them to get out of their sets a little bit, made them play one-on-one a little more. That's something that we really like. I think we liked our matchup one-on-one.

And it's just about guarding your guard. We really took pride in guarding one-on-one. He was able to get downhill sometimes, but that just happens. He's a really good player.

Definitely with Duke, we were just watching the game. We seen like first half, we knew that they came out a little flat, but that's just -- 16-1 game, you kind of look at them like this should be a cakewalk, but that's just really never the case. Every team deserves to be here, and you can't look at any team like that.

Q. How important was getting that kind of a game to open the tournament just to get you into the tournament?

DUSTY MAY: Well, these games are tricky, as we saw earlier with Duke and Siena, and I thought Duke handled that near upset with great maturity. When things weren't looking great for them, and this is what I learned and we learned from it today, they didn't try to go one-on-one and play hero ball.

They made some hustle energy plays, and those are the ones that turned the tide, offensive rebounds, second, third shots, maybe a stop that turns into a transition basket.



We have a lot of respect for Howard. Especially everyone that's a fan of Malcolm Gladwell, like I am, but David versus Goliath, according to Malcolm, wasn't necessarily an upset because there's a slingshot involved. In the first half Howard had their slingshots out. They were shooting the cover off of it off the bounce, off the catch. I was actually thinking, this is how they usually happen.

Fortunately we were able to score the ball also. We took it -- we did a good job against their pressure. We were able to get it inside, especially in the second half and take advantage of what the game was giving us.

Q. Dusty, I think six games, if I counted right, without L.J. now. What's the process of adjustment in terms of how Trey has adjusted his additional role or more minutes, and the same with Roddy, and how has that, in particular defensively, his absence, affected your perimeter defense in L.J.'s absence?

DUSTY MAY: Yeah, obviously it hurts because of how well he was playing. I probably should go back and watch a couple of his sub-par games just so I'm not missing them quite as much. Obviously his point of attack defense was incredibly effective, and now flip the script, every time that Trey has a bad possession, and there aren't many of them, I think, wow, this is great reps for him, now, later, whatever the case. I'm a big believer in you learn from going through failure or difficult or just things like that.

You're going against a small, quick team that's pressing you, and we don't have a great ball handling lineup per se on the court, and he's got to manage the game. He's got to get it where it needs to get to. Then he's got to get us organized.

In my mind I'm thinking this is great for him because if L.J. was here, he'd be getting all these reps. And then no one else would be -- other than Elliot and L.J., there wouldn't be anyone else having an opportunity to manage the game like this.

Q. Dusty, how much of the second half defense was more intensity and how much was it scheme, and then can you just talk about Will Tschetter's minutes and what he gave you offensively to help keep you close when they were shooting so well?

DUSTY MAY: The assistant coach did a great job of switching a couple matchups. And in the first half, obviously Aday has trouble guarding on the perimeter against 6'5" fast guys. But we were able to control matchups a little bit better because we were scoring.

But the thing I noticed, I told the guys after the game that I

heard their shoes squeaking on the other end a lot more than I did in the first half. I thought our communication was better. Our intensity improved. Who knows why we didn't play like that in the first half. Maybe their shot making had something to do with it.

But yeah, just overall it was a little bit of both.

Q. Just talk about Morez Johnson and Aday Mara's performance. It seemed like the second half the big fella got going and you were able to get a comfortable lead.

DUSTY MAY: You know, credit Howard. When you press -- we don't know if they're going back man or zone, it's difficult for us to get organized and run one of our plays to get it inside to one of them.

They had to make the initiative to fight for position, and then their teammates had to get them the ball and acknowledge the matchup advantages we had.

I thought in the second half we did a really good job of looking up the floor early, recognizing our -- they have advantages, we have advantages, recognizing our advantages, and I think those body shots probably affected their shooting and everything else during that stretch when we were able to separate.

Q. I know we've talked about it a lot already, we talked about on court with Morez and Roddy, what they saw after halftime, but what did you personally say at halftime to light a fire under your Wolverines?

DUSTY MAY: I don't remember. It wasn't anything major. We have great leadership in our locker room. Probably one or two things schematically and the then one or two things as far as avoiding getting tight and just learning from these upsets that we've seen in the past or near upsets that we just had to keep playing.

The game was a high-possession game, which we love, so that helps us with the variants of avoiding an upset. We felt good about it. I'd say 90 percent of it was focused on our defensive effort.

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