

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Final - Illinois vs UConn

Saturday, March 30, 2024

Boston, Massachusetts, USA

TD Garden

Illinois Fighting Illini

Brad Underwood

Coleman Hawkins

Marcus Domask

Elite 8 Postgame Media Conference

UConn 77, Illinois 52

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us, gentlemen. Coach, when you're settled, thoughts on tonight's game. Thank you very much.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Well, I think that I didn't expect that. But tons of credit to UConn. I thought that we were in a good spot at half. Especially after the slow start.

I thought Clingan dominated the first half with his defensive abilities. We obviously came out in the second half and got blitzed. Got some decent looks. Kind of felt like we were doing some of the things we've always done, but Donovan made good blocks.

And then they do what they do. They got out in transition, turned some of those blocks, turned a few turnovers into lay-ups. But give them credit. I'd be -- I stink at these, end-of-the-season deals. 29 wins, Big Ten championship, Elite Eight. I don't want one person in this program that's had anything to do with our men's basketball program to remember it about this game.

What an incredible season. They took a coach on a ride that was so fun. It's the funnest group of guys I've ever been around to coach in terms of enjoyment, the professionalism, their achievement. It's very hard to win 29 games in college basketball. This team did that playing the schedule that we played.

Today wasn't our day. We're a game short of the Final Four, but getting to the Elite Eight not something that we're going to just forget about and blow off. That's quite a



successful season.

Coleman's been with us four years. What an unbelievable, unbelievable season that he's had and unbelievable career. Marcus has been with us a year. So we've got the gamut, the guy that's been with us four, the guy that's been with us one. Both of them all-league players. Both of them as good a people as they are players.

Marcus came in and was everything and more that we thought he would be when he transferred in. The same from Quincy, the same from Justin. And, obviously, Terrence being a part of that, I just -- our young guys, I feel great about.

But great, great season. Tough ending. But, man, I'm just so blessed. I mean, I'm truly blessed that I got to coach this group. Today wasn't what any of us expected. With that being said, I might be the most blessed person in college basketball today.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

Q. Coach, obviously, not the ending you wanted. Do you feel like the program turned a corner, especially with the late-season run, that you put yourself in a position where you can continue to build, whether it's through the portal or high school recruiting?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I thought we turned the corner in year 2. I think we've been the winningest program in the Big Ten the last five years. I think we're one of five high-major programs that have won 20 games for five years. Four or five.

I think we've turned the corner a long time ago. This is a great program. We're getting guys like him out of the portal. We're getting guys like him out of high school. We've got another great recruiting class. We'll continue to add guys we want.

I guess are you asking should we slip? Shame on you. You've been around me five years. Hell, we're not going anywhere.



Next.

Q. Coleman and Marcus, how will you remember this year and how do you hope it's remembered from a fan base?

COLEMAN HAWKINS: I'll remember this year as I feel like a senior year where I kind of showcased what I can do personally. And then as a team, I think just the fun we had I feel like the teams before were a lot more serious. And this team, we can go out and just have fun and still practice hard, play hard.

I don't think we -- me personally, I don't think we've had a bad practice this year. I feel like sometimes we dread doing certain things, but we still go out and do it as hard as we can.

We've had a great year, filled with great people, and it was just a fun group to be around. There was no cliques. There was nothing like that. Everybody's always included. I hope to -- I hope that same feeling goes in the future. I want to stick around with this group and have fun with this group for the rest of my life.

MARCUS DOMASK: Same for me. Just the joy that this group has brought me. I've had a lot of fun in my last year of college. So, I mean, just joyful.

Q. Coach, what was your message to the guys in the locker room after such an incredible season ends the way it did?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Well, there's a lot of tears. I'm very, very emotional both ways. Thanked our staff. There's a lot of people around this program who have tried to help each and every one of these young guys become the best they can be.

I think there's nothing that should allow them to have their head down. You won 29 games. You played in the Elite Eight. You're part of a Big Ten championship. You got to do it in front of a very passionate fans and a bunch of people. It's not just players and coaches in tears, there's a lot of support staff and people that got really close with this group and got to go along on the ride that they gave us.

So it's -- like I said, I'm the most blessed coach in America today. We lost the game, but being able to coach guys like this is what drives you and it's the reason I started doing this.

Q. Brad, can you just speak to just what it means to you and just the program to have a guy like Coleman hang in there with you guys for these four years?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Yeah. It's what the this thing's supposed to be around. I'm not knocking Marcus because he transferred. He spent four years. It's going through the growth. It's the process of you get them as a boy, and they leave as a man. Hopefully, along the way, there's some life lessons learned not just on the basketball court.

But his development on the basketball court speaks for itself. I don't need to talk about that. We're not here if it's not for him. He's been a stabilizing force in our program, not just as a player but as a guy in the locker room.

High character, tough, resilient, and really good.

Q. Coach, you guys fell behind early. You came back, you fought back the whole first half to tie it. That's when things went amiss for your team. Besides X's and O's, during timeouts, what do you tell your players to keep them motivated, to keep them in the game, to keep them focused on cutting in on that lead?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Yeah, and it was more about the fact we've just been doing this. You know, we got down double digits in three Big Ten games. And it was staying positive. It was not as much problem solving.

Like I said, I thought we were getting the same shots we've always gotten, and Clingan erased a few of them. We missed some opportunities to shoot some threes. But, again, it was all about staying together, being the team that we've always been.

Again, give them credit. I think we ran out of gas a little bit. That's no excuse. But just keeping this group in a positive light and keep them trying to believe we can do anything, because we did it all year.

Q. Brad, there's a stat that you guys were 0-for-19 on shots challenged by Donovan. Are you comfortable with the way you attacked him? Would you have liked to -- maybe you said there shoot more threes, space him out? How do you evaluate that?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: He's good. He did his job. He's good. That's why he's -- I mean, doesn't everybody have him projected in the lottery or close to it? Yeah, he does a great job of protecting the rim.

We talked ad nauseam about spacing them, yet you got a two-foot jump stop. Marcus got some good booty ball stuff early but give him a lot of credit. Got an elite guy back there.

Q. Brad, the moment you had with Terrence when he



**came off the court, what was your message to him?
Looks like you gestured to the fans and directed him
to take in the moment. I don't know.**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: That's between he and I.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen. Appreciate it.

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