

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

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Wisconsin Badgers

Greg Gard

Tyler Wahl

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Postgame Press Conference



MEN'S BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT

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PRESENTED BY
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Ohio State - 65, Wisconsin - 57

GREG GARD: First of all, congrats to Ohio State. I thought they'd been playing better since the last time we saw them a month ago. Obviously for us disappointing start, the first half. I thought they were way more aggressive than we were. They put us on our heels in a lot of situations. They got very comfortable with what they were doing offensively.

By the time we'd rallied and played with more aggressiveness, more physicality in the second half, obviously we had ourselves dug into way too deep of a hole. It's a good lesson for us in terms of the tale of two halves, but I thought the difference was the aggressiveness and the physicality they played with in the first half that we did not match, and second half we finally started to do some things how we've done them for part of the year.

Q. Tyler, you've played a ton of games in that uniform. How can you explain what Greg just talked about, the fact that they were so much more aggressive? You guys knew you had to win some games here in terms of the NCAA.

TYLER WAHL: It hurts because we knew what we were getting ourselves into. We know the position we put ourselves into, and we had to come out here and win the game. We definitely did not start with the urgency that we needed to.

I do like the way that we fought back, but at the end of the day, we've just got to be better.

Q. You guys returned basically everyone. How do you

make sure the season isn't remembered as a season of frustration. What lessons can you get from this year?

CONNOR ESSEGIAN: We know who we got in the locker room. We know the talent within the locker room. We're here for a reason, and I know there's a lot more that we could have done this season so far. I'm just hoping we're able to really prove people wrong.

Q. Tyler, in the first half, the ball wouldn't go for you guys, especially inside. What was the frustration level there that you got good looks, just couldn't get them to go? Seemed like it kept going up against you. They built a lead while it was tough for you to go in.

TYLER WAHL: I feel like seeing those shots not go in definitely played on us, and it affected our defense. They were super aggressive. We were not sound on defense by the start of it, and from the shots not going in, we just dug ourselves in a huge hole, and it was hard to come back from that.

Q. Lots of better second half rebounding and shooting obviously coming from you and other players on the team to try to help bridge the gap. How were you able to use your leadership skills to try to turn things around and put yourself back in a fighting chance in this game?

TYLER WAHL: It's a great question. I feel like we just went out there, we knew what the stakes were. We had a little talk at the locker room at halftime. We knew what was at stake, and we knew what we had to do. We had to come out with a lot more better energy, and we had to get some stops.

We got some down the stretch, and it just wasn't enough.

Q. After some of the early three-pointers weren't falling, it seemed like you guys stopped taking them as a team, in the first half especially. Is that something that you wish that maybe you would have taken a few more of those looks, would have tried to get a few more looks from beyond the arc?



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CONNOR ESSEGAN: That's kind of a tough question to answer. Kind of just being out there, you really just kind of look and see what's open. We were able to get some more stuff going inside in the paint. I felt like that helped us a lot in the second half getting us going a little bit, especially when the three ball is not falling.

You've really just got to go out there and play. It's tough to answer. I'm not going to lie.

Q. Connor, obviously an important game. Do you think you were a little tight as a team? Not just you, but as a team do you think you were a little tight, especially the first half?

CONNOR ESSEGAN: You could see it. There was a lot of guys that everyone just seemed a little tense. I feel like that's something we've just got to prepare and be ready for the next game.

Honestly we've just got to be ready for the next time.

Q. Tyler, I know you didn't have the best first half as a team, but you went on an 8-0 run in the second half. If this is your final game in a Wisconsin uniform, what can you take away from it and the experience overall?

TYLER WAHL: The game itself, that was a tough one because it was definitely one that we wanted to win. From an overall standpoint, I can't thank the university enough, coaches and my teammates enough for everything they've done.

Q. You talked about the defense and you said you let Ohio State get comfortable. What do you think you guys did not do defensively that allowed them to get some early looks that they had?

GREG GARD: I thought we weren't physical enough, part of it. When you allow a team to shoot 68 percent, that obviously tells you.

Also at times through the half, we had no fouls. We went pretty deep into the half without fouling. That told me that we're not physical enough, we're not up in the ball enough. We didn't stop dribble penetration on a couple drives to the rim.

They get a couple of easy baskets and then the step-backs and the things that Thornton and Sensabaugh and we same-side helped twice on Sueing and gave him a three and then fouled him on the other one, those are things that just give them more confidence. When you're trying to battle back and you've given them that many opportunities to get feeling good about themselves.

Second half, I thought we were much more physical and approached it more like we should have from the beginning.

Q. Greg, what did you try to say to them in the first half to try to just settle down, kind of get some of that tenseness out? It looked like it kind of compounded a few times where it just spiraled a little bit?

GREG GARD: I thought we looked really hesitant. I thought we looked -- just some looks on some guys faces that I haven't seen in terms of -- I think the biggest thing was just be more aggressive on both ends of the floor.

Like I mentioned with the question with Jeff, we talked about that in a few of those huddles that we don't have any fouls yet. We can be more physical, more aggressive, get up into the ball more. In the second half we did it. I thought McGee gave us a boost by doing some of that. Jordan Davis did that. Gilmore was more active, and we were more assertive in the second half and kind of got them on their heels, much like they did to us in the first half.

And the same thing with the pressure too. We threw the ball away, didn't handle simple overplays. That told me we were hesitant and tentative, and they were the more aggressive team in the first 20.

Q. Just same thing I asked the guys: You guys are bringing back almost everyone from the rotation. What could you take away from this game, just the whole season?

GREG GARD: There's been a lot of lessons that haven't been pleasant to go through that these guys have experienced that that's what I talked about afterwards, that we have to be able to use these to our advantage no matter what happens the rest of this year and spinning forward. We're more focused on this year right now.

We obviously have maturing to do in some of these areas, and we've seen that. I think that's the one thing with younger teams is the inconsistency, and we sometimes we change colors right within a game.

Today's a good example of being put on our heels in the first half and then getting back to who we need to be and who we need to be to be good in the second half. So that's always a challenge with a younger group to have them understand that and always approach it that way, and it usually comes more natural and more consistent with older guys.

So that's something we've got to continue -- I've got to help them with it, and leadership has to grow organically within. There's a lot of hurtful lessons this year that we've had to go through that have stung that we have to bottle and use to our advantage.

Q. On that same line, when you look at the season, it had an extraordinary number of close finishes. You had some good wins. You've had some frustrating times. What has this season been like with the ups and downs you've had to go through?

GREG GARD: I've enjoyed this group. They've given us everything they've had. I can't ask for more of an effort with everything they've done. As a coach, when you have your kids play hard and they play hard for you, if the ball doesn't go in some nights, you have some frustrating halves or segments of games, but this group has continued to come back and want to learn and want to get better.

Like I said, they've been fun to coach. It's just been a lot of frustrating results at times, and I can't say that I didn't know, I didn't see this coming in terms of just things we had to grow through. The only way you grow through it is you have to go through it. Adversity and some of those adjectives that align with that are most often the best teachers. They have to go through it and understand how important, you name it, is in order to be a good team, be a good, consistent team.

For me and our staff, just trying to help them see that, help them through it, and then help leadership continue to blossom and grow within the locker room.

Q. You pulled Steven Crowl at the 16 minute mark and ended up playing him at the 4:47 mark. Chucky and Connor, you brought them in at the 5:22 mark. If you had the decision again, would you play them a little earlier?

GREG GARD: No. I thought Steve looked -- I thought he looked heavy-legged at times. I thought he couldn't finish and they also went small with Brown. Okpara was on the bench at times. And Gilmore was giving us a boost. Same thing with Jordan Davis and Kamari McGee, I thought they were able to provide energy and some juice for us off the bench.

So when we were riding that wave and making a comeback to get the deficit down, I just was going to go with the guys until they told me, I needed a break. So I went back to Steve when Okpara got back in, and Gilmore played a lot of minutes consecutively.

Q. Greg, you mentioned Gilmore being -- sorry, Crowl

being heavy legged. Earlier you said the look on some guys' faces. Was Crowl one of those guys? It looked like a couple of time the ball got knocked out of his hands and they weren't really doubling him.

GREG GARD: I just thought we weren't aggressive. We weren't asserting. We weren't attacking the paint like like we have at times. We've watched his growth and development, and one of the big jumps he's got to make is he's got to be assertive and aggressive and try to -- I sometimes tell him he's too unselfish. He's always looking to pass instead of trying to go score. So that's part of his maturity and growth.

Q. Tyler mentioned the position that you guys put yourself in as a team, obviously with the NCAA Tournament on the line. Did you come into this tournament feeling that you had to win a few of these to have something to watch on Sunday?

GREG GARD: I don't know. I'm not a bracketologist. You can look around and find differing opinions. If we are, we'll get ready to go and do that, and if we're not, we've had a lot of opportunities to put ourselves in position.

So résumé comparison and all that stuff -- we wanted to come in here and try to win this thing. That was the goal that we talked about. Then you end up wherever you are after that. So I said to this group hopefully we have more basketball to play. We'll find out in due time.

Like I said, the intent and what we talked about was trying to win here today and move on tomorrow and see if we can stack five together. Whatever that leads to down the road, we live with it.

Q. Just to clear up, because Tyler was asked about putting on his uniform. Would you play in the NIT?

GREG GARD: I haven't gone down that road. Really I've been focused on this and worried about preparing and helping these guys try to do some damage here.

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