

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 8, 2023

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Minnesota Golden Gophers

Ben Johnson

Dawson Garcia

Ta'Lon Cooper

Postgame Press Conference

Minnesota - 78, Nebraska - 75

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by the Minnesota Golden Gophers. Head coach Ben Johnson along with Ta'Lon Cooper and Dawson Garcia. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach. Take it away.

BEN JOHNSON: Credit Nebraska. Fred obviously does an unbelievable job with that group, and to finish the season the way they did, hat's off to those guys. It's been a battle all three times we've played them. I have a ton of respect for them, their staff, and their players.

But credit to my guys. I thought the resolve and toughness that they showed, both mental and physical, the entire game, especially after getting off to a rough start, was phenomenal. And that's what it takes to win at this level and in this tournament.

Q. Ta'Lon, just talk about the free-throw shooting. I know earlier in the year you hit some big ones. Talk about what was going through your mind down the stretch there.

TA'LON COOPER: Nothing was really going through my mind. Just stepping up, just knocking down the free throws. They make me come in every day and shoot 75 free throws, 75 makes, so I think that helped a lot. Just having confidence stepping to the free-throw line.

Q. I think you guys had 25 assists in the first 36 minutes because I think everything at the end was free throws. What did you guys do to break Nebraska's defense down so well and be able to throw it around and get guys open?



**MEN'S BASKETBALL
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DAWSON GARCIA: We know the back side and the skips is what they give when they post double, so really just getting into the opposite side. Then just getting them in rotation, whether it's taking the open shot, driving the close-out or swing, swing. Just really keeping the ball hot.

Q. For both of you, what does this one mean, all the struggles that you guys have gone through this year? But Ben said you guys just kept showing up. Maybe use this as a different, second season for you guys.

TA'LON COOPER: It means a lot. We've been coming every day like Coach said, working hard. It shows, if you come in every day, pay attention to details, follow what the coach is telling you, what their defensive plan is, defensive scheme, it works for a win.

DAWSON GARCIA: Just kind of like what Lon was saying. Just showing up each and every day. We know we're playing good basketball right now, so we know it's not a fluke. So we'll just continue to ride this wave that we're on and trying to build off of it.

I know for a fact nobody's like satisfied in the locker room or anything like that. So we're going to go back tonight, get ready for Maryland and come ready to play.

Q. Ta'Lon broke the team record for assists in the tournament.

BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, he beat mine. That's what Michelle told me, yeah.

Q. Pretty early. Just talk about the first half and the ball movement and the execution, and that carried over to the confidence that you guys had.

BEN JOHNSON: I thought our guys were fully bought in, in what we were trying to do scheme-wise, offensively, and they did a great job executing. All credit goes to those guys. They made the right plays when the right plays needed to be made.

I thought they were aggressive. I thought they built confidence within each other as the game went on, and I



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thought that was important. But I just thought our toughness really showed on both sides of the ball.

Again, we've come a long way with our free throws, but we just kept telling these guys, beginning-middle of the year, to stick with it. Again, live in the gym, and eventually it's going to pay off. I think we saw that tonight.

Q. Coach, can you assess you all's performance out of double-teams in the post?

BEN JOHNSON: They do a really good job, their post double, and they do a great job rotating out of it, and they have good size. We had a couple things we wanted to go to, and I just thought we handled it well.

I didn't feel like we allowed their double to rush us. I thought we had a good rhythm in what we were trying to do, and we moved it once we got out. If you can skip it and it's wide open, that's great. But sometimes it's the one more or it's the swing, swing or it's the shot and the drive. You've got to get them in rotation.

Then they do a great job flooding the ball. So you've got to play off two feet. I thought our guys for the most part attacked it with purpose and just didn't get sped up.

Q. Hindsight being 20/20, would you have taken Battle out of the game, and how would you have assessed your technical and the impact that it had on the game?

BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, I was probably 0 for 3 on coaching decisions in this one. No, it was a tough call. I put myself in his shoes in that minute and said, you know what, he's given a lot to this school. Sometimes you've got to let it rip and let it ride.

I knew they were probably going to go back to the ball screen with Griesel, but like I said, sometimes I wanted to side with him and let it rip a little bit.

My technical, that was on me 100 percent. That was probably not the smartest thing to do. And the third one was we have been working on it in practice a bunch with the last second free-throw situation, and I knew with Tominaga in the game, that they're always going to -- there's a chance he's going to throw something in, and it's going to look good. Fred obviously is phenomenal with drops late.

I debated in the timeout whether to have Jaden miss it, and I'm yelling at him to miss it and he didn't. So I'm thinking that was dumb not to make sure that we missed that free throw. I was 0-for-3 but 3-for-3 because luckily none of them burned us.

Q. Coming in with playing the Wednesday game, how did your staff kind of approach scouting Maryland? Or what did you learn from the two regular season matchups during the season to try to replicate a similar result tomorrow?

BEN JOHNSON: They're a really, really, really good team. I think Kevin does a phenomenal job, I really do. What they do defensively has caused us problems. They've got great depth. They've got veteran players that know how to play. They've got a couple studs.

It's going to be a very, very tough game for us. So we've got to go back to the hotel and really have a phenomenal game plan to be successful tomorrow. I'll tell you what, it's better than the alternative. So we'll go back, and it will be a late one, but that's what we want and we'll figure it out.

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