

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 9, 2023

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Michigan Wolverines

Juwan Howard

Hunter Dickinson

Kobe Bufkin

Postgame Press Conference

Rutgers - 62, Michigan - 50

JUWAN HOWARD: I would say "good afternoon" to everyone, but unfortunately, it wasn't a good afternoon for us. We came up on the other end, where we lost, and it was a tough loss for this team, for this coaching staff, and also for the university.

I'm proud of our young men on how they competed throughout the season. Obviously they wanted another outcome. They wanted to continue to keep playing throughout the tournament.

I feel that throughout this season with the adversity that we've been through, I think we grew from it. No, really, trust me, we did grow from it. I wouldn't want to be with any other group but this group of young men that I'm so proud of.

Neither one of them from day one has ever pointed the finger at one another or blamed this guy, that guy, or the coach. I'm so proud of how we always talk about being a family, and family was truly tested today and tested throughout the season. With that, I'll turn it over to questions for the players.

Q. Kobe, Hunter, for both you guys, when a few shots in the second half don't start going in, can sometimes that be contagious, or how would you guys classify or qualify the 1-for-17 start in the second half?

KOBE BUFKIN: I feel like sometimes that's just the way the ball bounces. Obviously with didn't get off to a great start in the second half, but we stuck through it. The outcome just wasn't what we wanted.



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HUNTER DICKINSON: I agree. I feel like we had a couple good looks in there. Like Kobe said, sometimes the ball just doesn't fall in the hoop.

Q. With your NCAA Tournament hopes very much in doubt, how do you kind of assess the season at large given what your goals were?

HUNTER DICKINSON: We talked about in the locker room that we'll wait until we get back to talk about it as a group.

Q. Rutgers forced 14 turnovers, I think it was, that game, and some of the things they were doing defensively down the stretch really slowed you guys down. What did you see that made it so difficult?

KOBE BUFKIN: Give credit where credit is due. Obviously Rutgers is a very good defensive team. Me personally, I felt like I probably played my worst brand of basketball on the worst day to play it. Seven turnovers is unacceptable.

But give credit where credit is due. They're a very good defensive team.

Q. That was going to sort of be my same question, but I guess you guys had cut it to one. It was 40-39. They hit a free throw, miss a free throw, get the rebound, put it back, and that sort of started a 12-0 run. Was that deflating at all? Could you talk about that moment and what that sort of started?

HUNTER DICKINSON: It is a little deflating. Just miscommunication between us, the guys out there. That's something we practice a lot. Unacceptable. The coaches emphasize it in practice and in timeouts of one guy declaring the shooter, one guy pinching in.

So that's just on the players on the floor to do a better job of communicating to one another.

Q. It's hard to tell sometimes when the shots aren't going in, but what did you make of the overall effort, especially maybe the last ten minutes of the game?



KOBE BUFKIN: I thought our effort was there. I mean, when shots don't fall, the game becomes tougher. But I feel like that's no excuse on the defensive end. Yeah, it's just unfortunate.

Q. You guys got out to a lead in the first half, and that was cut to just three at halftime. What kind of adjustments did you try to make at halftime, and how do you think you tried to implement them, and how do you think you maybe fell short?

HUNTER DICKINSON: At halftime we knew offensive rebounds was a big area of concern. They had eight. So then we limited it to only four in the second half, but 12 offensive rebounds for a game is too much. It's already hard when we give up 14 turnovers, two of which were mine.

So when you give them another 12 extra opportunities on top of that, that's 26 extra possessions for them, and that's super hard for any team to try to come back from. For us, we've just got to do a better job of making sure that -- Coach always says it. Every possession matters so much, so just really try to concentrate on that motto.

Q. Just the biggest lesson and biggest takeaway that you guys will take in hopefully to next season?

HUNTER DICKINSON: I think it was just a really good lesson for the younger guys because we had a pretty young team. So I think it was just really good experience for them to realize how much these opportunities mean and how quickly they can go, especially once you get to March when you've only got one game. Like Coach always says, one-game series.

So you've just got to play your heart out. Every little mistake really adds up in the end, so you've got to try to take every possession and have that possession mean everything for you.

Q. How frustrating is it for you to be really the only one to get it consistently going and to attract those double and triple teams into the post?

HUNTER DICKINSON: I've been getting double-teamed all year. So I kind of had to accept that. This game, though, I should have did a better job of trusting my teammates. I think that's one thing, if I could go back and change, is just try to kick it out a little bit more.

I should have trusted my teammates more. They're obviously more than capable. We've got guys who will be playing professionally someday, whenever they choose, so I've got to do a better job as a leader to trust my guys and

instill that confidence in them.

Q. Hunter, did you see Rutgers do anything differently coming out of halftime to affect your scoring in the paint today?

HUNTER DICKINSON: I think they were helping a little bit more in the paint, just digging a little bit more, helping a little bit more. I think in the first half I had a little bit more of a one-on-one opportunity, and in the second half I think they were trying to collapse a little bit more.

Q. Kobe gets a big three at the end of the first half, you got some momentum. How did you feel coming out in the second half, and what went wrong that all of a sudden the thing unravelled on you?

JUWAN HOWARD: In the second half, Hunter touched on some of it, I felt we pressed a little bit too much as far as wanting to make deep play individually, and that of course allowed Rutgers to capitalize on either some rush missed shots or turnovers.

But overall, like in the second half, offensively for us to be able to only make four shots and shoot 4-for-21, then you also add the turnovers and then offensive rebounds, it was just a really rough second half for this group.

At times we got a little out of character as far as what we do instead of just keeping it simple, like we did in the first half. Yes, they doubled in the post, but we've been in situations before all season long where they've doubled and we've made simple plays out of the post.

Please, do not get this wrong. Do not think that I am blaming anyone. I'm just saying overall as a team we could have done a better job of just being patient and making the simple play.

Q. Weeks ago you went to Jersey Mike's Arena and beat Rutgers by 13. Obviously a different result this time out. What did you see differently from Rutgers this time out?

JUWAN HOWARD: The second half defensively for us, we didn't do a good job of keeping the ball in front. I will also say this too that there were some open shots by them that they made where they were uncontested.

Last time we played at Rutgers, we pretty much contested the vast majority of any shot that was taken and also did a really good job of protecting the paint.

The offensive rebounds, I would also add to that as well. Hunter touched on it earlier. Eight offensive rebounds in

the first half, four in the second half, giving them extra possessions. When we went to Rutgers, we were the aggressor, and we won the rebounding game. And we also did a really good job of keeping them off the glass.

So that's what I saw was the big difference compared to the first time we played.

Q. There was a timeout early in the second half you were telling your guys to keep your heads up. Hunter mentioned it, the sort of deflating feeling there early in that stretch. Did you feel the energy level just was an issue?

JUWAN HOWARD: Oh, yes.

Q. And why do you think that was?

JUWAN HOWARD: Yes. Everyone really cares about what happens and the outcomes of the ballgame. That's a beautiful thing to have when you talk about the entire team dialed in to giving to each other and wanting to see everyone succeed out there on the floor and love to have the outcome in our favor.

Then you notice in timeouts, and you see that some dejected, unhappy young men, and it's the early part where it's maybe ten minutes left or seven minutes left in the ballgame. I think it's my job as a leader to uplift them and encourage them because I saw the looks on the faces.

I've done a pretty good job of reading people, and those young men that I've been around, I've been in practice with them every day, been in the game situations, whether it's pressure moments or whether it's where we are leading by a lot of points, I know them. That's the energy that it made me feel hurt for them, but at the same time, I wanted to uplift them.

Q. What can you say about Rutgers' performances on both the offensive and defensive side of the ball?

JUWAN HOWARD: It's documented that Rutgers is one of the best defensive teams in the Big Ten and also in the country. One of the things that they're missing, obviously, is one of their players, key players, but then overall you have to give Steve and his staff a lot of credit on how they have fought through adversity just like we have.

He's also been a great leader to his team and his coaching staff. But one of their biggest strengths, and they lay their hat on, is playing with effort and playing with toughness. That's one of the things we've always emphasized when we game plan versus them is you're going to get a team that's going to play hard every possession.

And that's led by Cliff, the starting center. Their team feeds off his energy. And you could see in the second half, he was very active out there, contesting shots, blocking shots. His presence in the middle affected us.

Q. Juwan, you mentioned they were pressing a little bit. There was a lot riding on this particular game. Do you think they felt that at some point?

JUWAN HOWARD: This world is surrounded by so much information, and the information can be delivered to you instantly. Like I call it a microwave world because not only there's so much information out there, our young men is able to see it, read it, and they understood the magnitude of this game, and they've heard it so many times from media or social media how every game's important, what lies on it and what your fate would look like if you can move forward to advance to the NCAA Tournament.

Rutgers was aware of their situation as well. So we all knew it was going to be a big game, and every game that pretty much we faced has been big games.

I'm just so proud, and I'll say it again, of how our guys competed all year. Yes, we have a young team, but we did not make excuses. That's how you grow, by getting the opportunity. We've had four freshmen that start, Kobe being one of those four freshmen because he didn't play last year. We also have Tarris Reed, who's another freshman that comes off the bench, and he gets a lot of minutes as well.

So this is a growing opportunity for our young men, and I think they grew up a lot this year. Yes, they want to continue to keep playing. I want to see them playing, and I want to be out there coaching them in the postseason. We'll go back home. We'll talk about what's the plan for the future, and we'll go from there.

Q. Juwan, I was going to ask, what are your hopes for the postseason?

JUWAN HOWARD: I just said it, we'll talk about it when we get home.

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