

# Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 9, 2023

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

**Ohio State Buckeyes**

**Chris Holtmann**

**Bruce Thornton**

**Roddy Gayle Jr.**

**Justice Sueing**

**Sean McNeil**

Postgame Press Conference

Ohio State - 73, Iowa - 69

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by the Ohio State Buckeyes. Head coach Chris Holtmann, Justice Sueing, Roddy Gayle Jr., Bruce Thornton, and Sean McNeil.

CHRIS HOLTSMANN: Give our guys a lot of credit. I just thought they really battled, found a way to pull it out when it didn't always look that way, especially late. Guys made big plays across the board. All three of these guys made big plays, four of these guys made big plays throughout the game.

Great effort over a really good Iowa team. I think this Iowa team obviously -- we were down, what, 30 at their place? So our guys had really good response.

Credit to our guys. Good luck to Iowa in the NCAA Tournament. I'm excited to follow them. I think they've got a really good team.

**Q. Roddy, Bruce throws you the pass there to the right wing with about 3:30 to go. You never hesitated. You took that shot, made the three-pointer, and that put you guys ahead for good, you go up three at that point. What's going through your mind there to take and make a clutch shot in that moment with the game kind of on the line?**

RODDY GAYLE JR.: In that moment, I just felt comfortable. Especially with Coach, I believe he has the utmost confidence in me and respect. Bruce, we practice



these things. These are just another moment for us.

We practice this stuff, late-moment games, time and score. It just felt comfortable, just felt like another shot, another game honestly.

**Q. Roddy, that stretch, though, you had, I think, you scored all nine of your points in the last six minutes. We talked about your defense and your offense coming along. What does it take in a game like that with the season on the line to make a couple of shots and to spark things?**

RODDY GAYLE JR.: I really have no explanation for it. You just got to do what you got to do, get the job done. I know that Coach wants me to be -- have my presence felt on the offensive and defensive side, so just stay aggressive and really defend my man and to do as much as the team needs me to do in order to win.

**Q. For any of you guys, Iowa came in shooting very well from the three, did not shoot as well today. What was it that you guys were able to do to limit them, in what had been a strength of theirs, especially in that second meeting at their place?**

SEAN McNEIL: Iowa's a really good shooting team, like you said. Credit to them. They've got a lot of good shooters. So it was probably two things: One, we did a really good job contesting, making them hit tough shots, or at least forcing tough ones.

I think they just missed a couple shots. Just wasn't their day, lucky for us.

**Q. Maybe for the veteran guys, just in terms of was that something from Roddy that you guys have seen all year in practice and stuff? Obviously he's been a great defender all year but hasn't done it as a scorer like that as he did late in the game. Is that something that you guys have seen all year that he maybe hasn't been able to show off as much?**

JUSTICE SUEING: Roddy is more than capable. Fortunately, our team, we have a lot of talented guys, a lot



of guys that can make plays, and Roddy was the one that stepped up for this game on the biggest stage to do that.

All of us have confidence in every guy that steps on the courts. So it's just built on his hard work and belief and trust throughout this entire year.

SEAN McNEIL: Roddy's a gamer. Been showing it in practice. We all have belief in him. It's just a matter of time before a night like this was bound to happen.

Credit to Roddy. He's a big part of why we won tonight.

**Q. Along those lines, is that an evolution to start trusting guys? Maybe in the early part of the season, maybe you didn't have that trust, but now you do. Did it take some time, or from day one did you believe in each other?**

JUSTICE SUEING: I think we believed in everyone's skill set. We knew we had a really talented and special group of guys. I just think, as the season went on, obviously guys felt more comfortable just playing with each other and kind of just meshing as far as making -- what's it called? Just kind of bouncing off of each other as far as how we play with certain guys on the court.

So Roddy did a great job today playing to his strengths, and it made a big difference for us.

**Q. For any one of you, you guys had a 5:30 tip last night, 1:30 tip-off today and then a 1:30 tip-off tomorrow. What kind of things do you focus on in terms of recovery from game to game when you're in kind of a tournament like this?**

BRUCE THORNTON: Got to get in the ice bath, you know what I'm saying? Got to do the small things the athletic trainer tells us to do, like small tissue, all the small things. Make sure you get your rest because yesterday was a quick turnaround, and we got to lock into attention to details too for the Iowa game.

Next game we've got to do the same thing, and I feel like we'll come out to win.

**Q. Two more big shots in the last two minutes. Justice, you've been fighting the three-pointer a little bit all season, but that was a crazy play. The ball is fumbled around and you even fumbled it and they didn't call double dribble. I don't know what was going on there.**

CHRIS HOLTSMANN: It wasn't a double dribble.

**Q. Just a fumble?**

CHRIS HOLTSMANN: Yeah, just a fumble.

**Q. So you hit the three, and then Bruce made a high bank shot there on the drive with about a minute to go. If you could each talk about those two plays, what happened. Go ahead.**

JUSTICE SUEING: At the start of the second half, I was a little hesitant shooting the three, but my teammates were telling me I need to let that go regardless of how I was feeling. The next opportunity I had, I hit a three in that corner and gave me a little bit of confidence.

The following play, Bruce trusted me to hit that shot at the end of the game. So it's just trust and confidence and just trying to get the job done and come out with the win.

BRUCE THORNTON: We did have confidence in each other. We see each other hit that shot multiple times in practice, walkthrough. So in the game, it's like second nature. I've got confidence in anybody for making any shot on the court.

When he made that shot, it was just another shot that I see every day. So I'm proud of the guys today. We got the win. It's time to move on to Michigan State.

**Q. Do you feel less tense as you go into this tournament knowing you don't have as much to lose compared to these other teams, in terms of postseason play?**

RODDY GAYLE JR.: No team in this league is a pushover. So it's important for us to always have the same level of approach with each team. Like Bruce said, we got to stay focused on the details and get ready for Michigan State tomorrow.

**Q. Justice and Bruce, I think you were both on the court, but the last like 20 seconds, that scramble play. The ball goes all the way up the court. Everybody's diving everywhere. What did you guys see on that play? What did it take to persevere through that and just kind of keep fighting? If they'd have got possession, it could have flipped things.**

JUSTICE SUEING: When it got to that loose ball that I had to dive on, I wasn't too sure who had the tie-up. So I kind of threw it to Bruce to kind of get that going. Yeah, they had the time. It ended up working out.

CHRIS HOLTSMANN: I think I told you that at the timeout.

JUSTICE SUEING: I might have forgot. Hey, it worked out at the end. We were able to stay composed, and Roddy made a good play in the backcourt.

BRUCE THORNTON: It basically summed up the whole game. It was a back-and-forth game the whole game. For us to come out with that possession to show we just wanted it more.

When Sway passed me the ball, I was not going to hold. I was finna to go score it at the end of the day. I'm glad we fought and we got the possession. We locked in, and at the end we got the win. I'm proud of my guys and proud of the coaching staff.

**Q. Coach, for the first time in tournament history, the lower seed has won the first four games. You've now been fortunate to be part of two of those matchups. How are you planning on keeping up that momentum going up against Michigan State?**

CHRIS HOLTMANN: I didn't know that. That's an interesting stat. I think it speaks to the depth of the league, which we all know really well. The league is really deep and balanced. I think we're just focused on continuing to play well, which we've done for the last few weeks. Just want to focus on that.

**Q. Yesterday was Sean. Today it's Roddy. I think Brice wasn't on the floor like the last three minutes. You've done this again a long time. Is this what has to happen to advance? You get guys who aren't expected to do something to do something?**

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Brice just wasn't feeling great. So that was part of the reason for that. Actually, kind of the reason for that.

I was really proud of Roddy. He's put in a lot of work, and he's had Bruce and other guys who have kind of had really big seasons. Obviously Brice is a freshman, and sometimes you can compare yourself to them, and it can bother you.

I think he's just stayed with working. We've had a lot of conversations, and he's just stayed with it, stayed working. I was really happy for Roddy to see this moment because we have a really high-level belief in what he's going to be. We just really do.

**Q. Do you see a different look in the eye, a different tone of voice, a different demeanor in the last few weeks? And how much is just simply confidence part of what's gone on with you guys lately?**

CHRIS HOLTMANN: I think that's part of it, but I think the reality is there were too many times throughout this year -- listen, there is a way you need to play when you're struggling and maybe you're down, and I think our team had to learn to play the right way when we go through adversity in games, and that's been a hard lesson for us, and it's taken us a minute to understand that.

There's a way you've got to play to give yourself a chance. Tonight was a great example. We've been saying that over and over, and I think it's been validated in how our guys have performed really starting with the first half at Purdue. You play the right way, you give yourselves a chance. We've done that.

And on top of that, I think, when you see some success, obviously confidence comes with that.

**Q. Advancing tomorrow to face Michigan State, what is that preparation like having those past two results this season against the Spartans?**

CHRIS HOLTMANN: They obviously got us really good at our place. We played really well at their place on Senior Night. They're a terrific team. It's as good a Michigan State team as the Final Four team. They shoot it as well as that team. They're different in their makeup, but I think it's as good as Michigan State team as maybe we've played. I think they're terrific.

So it will be a great challenge.

**Q. You guys had ten steals today. It seems like you guys have been getting really active in the passing lanes, knocking balls free and stuff like that. Has that been a specific emphasis coming in? It seems like the last two games here.**

CHRIS HOLTMANN: It has. Our defensive pressure and activities wane too much at times this year, and I think that's been the difference in really this closing stretch of play the last couple weeks, but certainly in this tournament has been our activity.

**Q. The first half it seemed like you guys were trying to control the tempo a little bit. The way they scored, was that part of the game plan trying to limit those things and just control the pace of the game?**

CHRIS HOLTMANN: I think it would have been hard maybe -- we beat them at our place in a high-scoring game. I think it was in the 90s. But I did feel like -- we weren't necessarily controlling tempo. I think we were just trying to get quality possessions.

Now, I did not think we attacked their pressure well until the second half. I thought in the second half we were able to take advantage of their press and attack it, and we kept saying that in timeouts. Once it gets to the second line, attack, and I thought we did that better than what we did in the first half.

**Q. You talked about them having to discover how to play the proper way. How difficult is it to wait for that maturity to come, and how do you kind of get a team to figure that out and get to that maturity point?**

CHRIS HOLTMANN: It was really hard. I think I questioned whether I was messaging the right things at times this year because I didn't feel like always I was -- you know, they were hearing me. It almost felt like we needed to go through really serious struggles for them to understand there's a way in which we have to play in terms of trusting each other.

And playing with the necessary focus on the next possession, that's really hard for any new team, but a young team and a new team to understand. Our understanding of that has just really, really improved.

Then I think, even when we were losing, we were preaching that, and we said, hey, we will see the results eventually. Fortunately it's been validated.

**Q. Going back to Roddy, a guy who's now gone through a whole regular season, does that begin to change for a freshman at this point of the year where he can attack off the dribble like he did a couple times there, things we haven't seen him do a lot but maybe now he's almost more towards his sophomore year and not as inexperienced as a freshman normally is?**

CHRIS HOLTMANN: That certainly helps. I think all those guys have played so many minutes as freshmen. Our four freshmen have played so many minutes. By this time, there's a level of maturity.

Now, maybe he's played the least amount -- maybe not -- but he's certainly got a much better understanding. That was an action that we had not run a whole lot, a couple of the actions there late for him. And honestly, I felt like Bruce might have been fatiguing a little bit. So we just wanted another playmaker. We see that's who Roddy's going to be, and he was able to really execute there late.

**Q. I want to ask about Bruce Thornton. You guys have put so much time and effort into working with him on how to lead the team and everything else. The two plays that really kind of stand out, the skip pass from Isaac, he hits the three-pointer. Iowa was getting**

**ready to maybe extend that and go on. Then obviously that drive at the end, where he takes him off the dribble and hits a high bank shot. You teach somebody to do something, that's great. But he's also got some abilities there.**

CHRIS HOLTMANN: He really does. His ability that makes him special is who he is as a kid and his competitiveness. He is an elite competitor when he's playing his best. I think he's an elite competitor for his age.

And all the plays he makes -- I mean, how many loose balls did he come up with again today when we really need them? I love the fact he was trying to finish the game off and make that layup when it got, whatever happened there. It kind of blacked out, I think. So I love his aggressiveness there.

But he is an elite competitor, and he really has led the way.

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