

# Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 9, 2023

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

## Penn State Nittany Lions Coach Micah Shrewsberry

Jalen Pickett

Andrew Funk

Seth Lundy

Postgame Press Conference

Penn State 79, Illinois 76

THE MODERATOR: We have the Penn State Nittany Lions, head Coach Micah Shrewsberry, along with Seth Lundy, Andrew Funk, and Jalen Pickett.

MICAH SHREWSBERRY: First of all, hat's off to Illinois. They're a hard team to play against. They put so much pressure on you offensively, pushing the basketball, rebounding the basketball.

They got us on the offensive glass in the first half, but I thought we really cleaned that up in the second half. I thought we took care of the ball better in the second half, and it kind of eliminated some of the run outs in transition they were able to get.

Then even when we were down, these guys never -- they never bat an eye and they never waver. That's the toughness of this group. There's no situation we haven't been through. We've been through everything.

I told them this morning at shootaround. This is a single-elimination tournament, and we've been playing single-elimination basketball for three weeks. Every single game has mattered. Every single game has been really important, and they've answered the bell every single time.

**Q. Seth, there was a point where it was 46-40 Illinois, and it looks like they're going to keep pounding the ball down low and there's not a lot you guys can do about it. You're probably the biggest defender you've got down there at the time. I think Dread was in the game. What were you guys thinking? What was**



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rolling through your minds? You're down six, and it looks like they've got all the momentum.

SETH LUNDY: We weren't rattled at all. We've had that lineup for two years now. We're just a tough team. We've been doing it for so long that we accept the challenge every single time. I know Myles can guard in the post, I know I can guard the post.

When a team is playing bigger than us, we use it to our advantage on the offensive end as well. We never get rattled. We stay together, talk to each other every huddle. Every time there's a timeout or something and the ball stops, we just huddle and talk to each other and come right back together.

**Q. Jalen, you were held to 1 of 4 shooting in the first half but then was 3 for 6 in the second to finish with 12 points. What was different from half to half for you?**

JALEN PICKETT: I felt like I got good looks in the first half. They just didn't drop. Second half I felt a little more comfortable getting to my spots and rising up and making shots.

Credit to my teammates. We had the lead at the end of the first half, and they made a lot of big shots. Seth and Funk were great that first half. Cam was great. We're a full team over here.

**Q. Funk, there was a lot of emotion in this game. We saw you do the go to sleep you've done a couple times this season. How did you prevent that emotion from kind of overtaking you when the emotion was frustration?**

ANDREW FUNK: For sure. Coach said after the game, we won a couple in a row on the road now. Obviously this is a tournament game, but it's an away game with Illinois being in Chicago. It kind of just goes back to Seth, like we just stuck together as much as we could.

We have a veteran group of guys that we've closed out a lot of games with, and kind of keeping that emotion at bay when we need to, but then using it to our advantage when



we know we can have kind of been like a fine line for us that we've done really well with, I think.

**Q. Jalen, I know there's still quite a bit left to play for and nothing is set in stone until Sunday, but theoretically you guys are out of the single elimination that you've been chasing for quite some time for the NCAA Tournament. What does that feel like to kind of feel like there is some security at least at this moment?**

JALEN PICKETT: Oh, yeah, that's great. We've been striving for that. It's still not set in stone for us, though, so we're going out there, we're going to play tomorrow, and we're playing still like it's our last game.

We don't want this season to end and we feel like we have a really good team, so we're just going to keep going.

**Q. Andrew, along the lines with the emotions of the game, there's the swing with the technical where you make the two free throws and then make the three-pointer go from down six to down one. How big was that for you guys, and did that feel like a turning point in the game for you?**

ANDREW FUNK: Yeah, definitely. Like I think it kind of goes back to the earlier questions about how we're battling down low in the post. Obviously he got an and-one off that play, but it almost feels like we get a little bit of break with the technical foul and shooting two free throws.

It's like we said, again, just using that momentum. We know we've played in a lot of tight games as well as the other thing. So trusting the guys around you to make plays and make shots, and I think that led to us really bearing down on defense, which was the bigger momentum swing.

We really held them, aside from that last two minutes, when they were kind of getting downhill shooting free throws and whatnot, they got some big stops, kind of allowing us to extend the lead.

**Q. Jalen, when you guys were 5-9 in the Big Ten and you lost four in a row, played pretty well against Maryland the last one, something must have happened to keep you guys in the fight. As you look back now, having pretty certainly made the NCAA Tournament, what happened back then that kept you in it?**

JALEN PICKETT: You can look down there at that guy, he really got after us in practice a couple times because he basically said like we've got to win it for ourselves too. We felt like we had a special group and we played good basketball at some of those points.

Basically our seniors came together, and we got the freshmen together like we're a good team. We started putting that belief behind it and kept going to work every single day. We just felt like the ball was going to bounce our way eventually.

**Q. Jalen, in the earlier parts of the game when you weren't scoring that much, you were still distributing the ball pretty well. Was that something where you were just looking to take what Illinois was willing to give you on defense? Andrew, can you talk a little about the ball movement? It seemed like pretty much every time Jalen got in a situation, he'd find you open.**

JALEN PICKETT: Just like I said earlier, we've got a great team. I don't have to force anything. Just try and make the right play every time down, get the right shot for Penn State. At the end, these guys make shots.

So they work on their game, and I trust every one of them who steps on the floor.

**Q. Coach Underwood and his players talked about you playing booty ball and not being able to touch you. How do you define booty ball, and is that a compliment?**

JALEN PICKETT: I play a physical game. I don't know about booty ball. I kind of want to change that word, but I play a tough game.

Just getting down to my spots, being aggressive down there. They kind of went to Coleman Hawkins in the second half, kind of tried to do it to us. That was a good fight down there with them.

They're a great team, and I can't wait to see them in March.

**Q. Jalen, there was 13 lead changes in today's game. How important is momentum in a game like this?**

JALEN PICKETT: Definitely. Momentum is very important. The ball can go either way. We built a lead, they came back. They took the lead, and we came back. We don't focus on highs and lows. We want to play the right way for a full 40-minute game whether we're up or down.

**Q. Lundy talked about not getting you rattled. What does it say about your team to weather the storm through lead changes, runs? Even the crowd was amazing for Illinois at least. What does it say for your team to get the win on a stage like this?**

MICAH SHREWSBERRY: Just a lot of trust in each other. I think that's the biggest thing. We've been through a lot. We've been through a lot this year. Highs and lows throughout, and not just like a season, in like games.

But there's a belief. There's a belief in each other that no matter what happens we're going to stay together and fight. We're undersized. We battle.

But like when the game's on the line and things aren't going well, like this group is really, really tough at the end of the day. Really tough. We just continue to fight. We continue to fight. We continue to fight until the tide starts turning our way.

**Q. What did you do when you were 5-9? Did you doubt yourself or your own methods? What was your method at that point that you decided upon?**

MICAH SHREWSBERRY: I had to be better for our guys, right? Like I had to find what was the best for this group. We've got an interesting group of guys, right? I never coached them. I coached Pickett for two years, Myles, Seth. The guys that are playing now, you get Funk and Cam thrown in there. There's a lot of personalities and they all respond to things differently.

So what's best for our group? This group needs to be loose and they need to be on the edge at the same time. As soon as you let your foot off the gas they let their foot off the gas. Sometimes I pushed it to the limit too much, and they didn't respond to that. I had to find what was perfect for them.

They had to be loose. I had to give them positivity. I had to do the things that just find them, what was perfect for this group. It took us a while to find it.

For us, they never wavered. No matter what they did, no matter what I asked them to do, they always did it. This group really believes in each other. I love it that they believe in me, but I believe in them 100 percent as well. I try to tell them that all the time. Nobody believes in this group more than I do. Nobody, nobody, absolutely nobody.

But I believe in this group so much. I had to find that right button to push and then keep pushing it, keep pushing it, keep pushing it, and I think we found it.

**Q. Micah, did you feel the emotion of this game or the importance of this game going into it? It seemed like it was intense on both ends of the court. It's not necessarily certain yet, but what does it feel to know you may have locked up a spot in the NCAA**

**Tournament today?**

MICAH SHREWSBERRY: I just knew how important this game was because of how good they are. We've talked here recently. We wanted to be playing our best basketball in March, and I think we're doing that. We wanted the peak right now. This is where we're peaking as a team. They know exactly -- like how we should attack certain things, and I don't even have to say it.

I'm calling, like last game we played Maryland, and I like -- it was an out of bounds play, and I said something, I called the out of bounds play, but I added a word to it, and it's not in any of our other plays, and I said it, and Funk looks at me and nods, and he knew exactly what I was talking about. He ran the play exactly what I was talking about.

Today I'm doing the same thing. I'm calling something, and they're nodding and they're doing it. I got in the huddle, man, I'm sorry, guys. This is what I called it at Butler, maybe at the Celtics, and they're like, no, you're good. We know exactly what you're talking about. Like this group is together. This group is together.

We're smart. We're tough. I love this group. We want to keep playing here. I'm not going to put anything in front of tomorrow's game. Tomorrow's game the most important game of our season because it's our next game. We're going to play as long as possible, man. I'm having fun. I'm having a lot of fun coaching these guys. I think they're having a lot of fun playing with each other.

**Q. Micah, you said about the roller coaster of the last three weeks, which is a lot for you to weather mentally because you've got to be the front of all this. I know that's why you get paid the big bucks, but how did you get through that yourself?**

MICAH SHREWSBERRY: A lot of phone calls, a lot of texts with a lot of friends who I trust. Our staff is great. Like all the time they're always asking me, like what do you need? What do you need? They're checking on my. I should be checking on them.

I should be trying to figure out what they need during this because it's stressful for everybody. It's stressful for us. It's stressful for our players. It's stressful for our families. So I want to make sure that they're okay. They're asking me what I need.

That's just a group. That's just a belief. I told our freshmen, I told -- I told all of our seniors on the court the other night how much it was important and how much they meant to me when they decided to stick around, when they decided to stay. Like Seth didn't have to stay. Myles didn't

have to stay. Pickett didn't have to choose to come here.

Even the freshmen we got, we'd never done anything at Penn State. It's been a long time. I'd never done anything as a head coach. But those guys put their faith and their belief in me, so my ultimate goal is I didn't want to let them down. Even when we were struggling, I didn't want to let those guys down because they believed in me.

We're going to prepare the same exact way for Northwestern. We're going to prepare. We're going to be ready to play, and we're going to give it our all tomorrow just because I don't want to let these guys down. I want them to play as long as possible.

**Q. Micah, during this recent stretch, Pickett's scoring numbers have been down a little bit, but his assists, it feels like, have been up pretty high. How have you seen his play making ability develop over the course of this year, especially in this very recent stretch?**

MICAH SHREWSBERRY: This dude makes unbelievable passes. He's guarded -- he's seen about every defense people have thrown at him, and they've done a bunch of different things and he just responds to it. They change things up from in the second half to later in the second half, and you doesn't have to call a timeout and talk about it.

He also has the ultimate trust in the guys we have on our team, just because they spend so much time. This is a working, working group. It's a group of fighters. It's a group of workers. These dudes are in the gym working. That's why we shoot the ball so well, because they put the time in. They put the time in.

If you have an off day, you're going to look over the top and see Andrew Funk, Seth Lundy, see Cam Wynter, you'll see our freshmen. These guys are in the gym even when they don't play. They go in the practice gym and shoot and they work.

This program is built on hard work. That's the culture that we have right now. So Pickett, like he trusts every single one of those guys, like I can make the pass, the right pass, and then they're going to make the right play. I think Seth's extra pass from the corner to the wing to Funk was one of the best plays all season for us. That's who we are. That's who we want to be. I was so happy he made that play.

**Q. Micah, what's your take on booty ball? Have you guy that's so comfortable posting you guys up from 23 feet?**

MICAH SHREWSBERRY: Just taking advantage of what we're allowed to do. Like we've been doing it all season.

All he's doing is playing basketball. You could say, yeah, he's got the dribble and he's backing people down, but they're playing booty ball in the paint. They're doing the same exact thing as us, just from a different position on the floor the way they were posting Dainja, the way they were posting Hawkins in the middle of the court. We just choose to start it in a different area.

I don't know. He's a good player. It's hard to stop. It's hard to deal with. That's why he's an All-American.

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