

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 10, 2023

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Rutgers Scarlet Knights

Coach Steve Pikiell

Paul Mulcahy

Caleb McConnell

Clifford Omoruyi

Postgame Press Conference

Purdue - 70, Rutgers - 65

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Rutgers University, Head Coach Steve Pikiell, Paul Mulcahy, Caleb McConnell, and Cliff Omoruyi.

STEVE PIKIELL: Thank you guys for traveling, too, and Rutgers Nation for coming out, appreciate it. Obviously a real tough game, but I'm proud of these guys. Right from the opening tip, they were ready to go. I think Purdue's the best team in the country, and they're definitely a 1 seed in the tournament. If they weren't in our league, they probably wouldn't have many losses at all.

Matt does a great job. Obviously got the National Player of the Year. But I couldn't be more proud of this group right here. They fought, and we proved that we can play with anybody. We beat that team, too, on the road, one of the great wins. Just came up a little bit short here today.

Again, a huge key for us was defend without fouling. Obviously that became the difference in the basketball game, but give Purdue credit. They're really good. They've got a lot of weapons. Gillis came in and did a really, really good job, obviously, for them, to go along with their other players who they're pretty consistent with.

Gave up probably too many second chance points in the second half especially, which hurt us. They're really good. It was a great college basketball game and great environment, NCAA Tournament-like game.

Q. Caleb, was the message from these two days from you guys that no matter where you end up in March,



you're not going to go out without a fight?

CALEB McCONNELL: The message has been the same all year, just stay connected. No matter what happens, ups and downs, just stay together.

Q. After what you guys did yesterday and the way you guys played today, what do you think this team has shown in this Big Ten tournament?

PAUL MULCAHY: I would say we showed our connectedness, how hard we play for each other. It shows how we care about each other and how really connected of a team we are.

Q. Caleb, after a foul was called on you in the later half of the game, you shared a few words with Head Coach Matt Painter. Can you share what you guys talked about?

CALEB McCONNELL: He just said it was a good play. He thought it was a good play. He thought it was questionable as well, but he just thought it was a good play and he told me good job.

Q. Caleb and Paul, just to bounce off the other question, do you think you showed enough this week here that you deserve to make it to the NCAA Tournament?

PAUL MULCAHY: Oh, yeah, 100 percent.

CALEB McCONNELL: Of course. We've got the best dunker, one of the best point guards, one of the best guards in the Big Ten. Defensive Player of the Year, a bunch of young guys ready to go. One of the best coaches, one of the best coaching staffs.

We don't take the backseat to nobody. I feel like March Madness deserves to see us play in it, and I feel like that's what they'll get.

Q. Cliff, this is your second time this year going up against Zach Edey, Big Ten Player of the Year. What's it like playing him, facing him for however many



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minutes?

CLIFFORD OMORUYI: It's not too hard to play him. My teammates, we all commented, there's no like one-on-ones like fight against the other teams. So playing together. You really can't let him get in the horseshoe. So we pretty much did that today. But it is what it is.

Q. Paul, what happened with you and Edey there at the end?

PAUL MULCAHY: High intensity game. I don't know. I think it was a jump ball or something, and then people got around. It's just basketball.

Q. What about your press today got them to struggle as much as they did trying to break?

PAUL MULCAHY: Our connectedness, our length, two-time Defensive Player of the Year, just our connectedness and our activity.

Q. Paul, it's noticeable the little bit of a shiner you got on your left eye. Do you remember when you got that exactly, what the play was?

PAUL MULCAHY: Yesterday, Kobe Bufkin on the baseline. It is what it is.

Q. Matt Painter a little while ago said you guys are obviously an NCAA Tournament team, that you could do some damage. After what you guys have done out here, do you have any doubt about that?

STEVE PIKIELL: I think we've played good really all year long. We went on the road and beat Northwestern in a tough place. That's the second best team in the league. We went on the road and beat Purdue, beat Wisconsin, beat Penn State. Played Michigan State. It was counted as a home game, but the Knicks are the home team in Madison Square Garden, not us. We never shoot there. We never practice there. So beat Michigan State, too.

This team's been great. We've got 19 wins in the best league in the country, most competitive league from top to bottom. I know everyone speculates on -- Nebraska could have beat anybody. Ohio State is still here. This league is unbelievable.

We have the National Defensive Player of the Year. We have the best dunker in college basketball. Paul, I think, is one of the best players. We did a lot of good things throughout the whole year, and I think today just showed you we can play with anybody.

We'll see what happens at the end of the year, not after every game. We'll see coming up here. These guys certainly deserve it. We were one of the best defenses in the country, period. So that's exciting, too. These guys have done a great job all year, and they represent the university as good as any program probably, as good as any players in the country.

Q. Do you feel like you found something these last two games with Derek having the ball in his hands a lot and just the way he played?

STEVE PIKIELL: Yeah, he's been just tremendous. He's been practicing better, and the guys have really done a good job, the veteran guys with him. When we had to change our rotation a little bit and lose a starter that late in the season and make some changes, too, but Derek, he's going to be really good. I've been saying that all along.

It's tough when you're a freshman. And Woolfolk gave us great minutes too. Those two guys are going to be a good part of our future, and they're great kids, too. I'm excited about the potential those guys have. The way we approach this week and how we went about it, Caleb with the bad back and Paul with the eye and everything else. So they deserve a day off here, and we'll see what the postseason brings.

Q. A taste of victory and a taste of defeat in the Big Ten tournament. What's something you tell your team after a defeat like you had today?

STEVE PIKIELL: That's as good a game and as good a basketball team we played against, Matt Painter. And we were right there in this basketball game throughout.

So you take a lot from that. We went up against the National Player of the Year and a Number 1 seed team and you went toe-to-toe with them and beat them on the road, too. One of the rare teams to go on the road and win. Purdue is an unbelievable environment there to win at.

Just told them we can play anybody. We're going to get that chance, and we'll see what happens.

Q. You mentioned defending without fouling. You guys committed 11 more fouls than them. Caleb fouls out. Three other starters with four fouls. What do you attribute it to, and what's your reaction to that big discrepancy?

STEVE PIKIELL: We were in foul trouble the whole night. Two really physical teams, really physical teams. I guess we got caught more than they did. But really good



basketball team.

Again, I tell our guys this all the time, our defense can stop just about anybody, but you can't defend that free-throw line. So you've got to do it without fouling and at the highest level in these kind of games, and we didn't today. So that's on me, and that's on our guys.

Q. You mentioned your resume. Do you feel like it's strong enough to get out of the First Four already instead of having to go to Dayton?

STEVE PIKIELL: I don't care about any of that. We want a chance to compete for the National Championship. This group has been great, and we can do some really fun things. I wouldn't want to play us, that's for sure.

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