

# Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 11, 2023

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

**Ohio State Buckeyes**

**Coach Chris Holtmann**

**Justice Sueing**

**Isaac Likekele**

**Sean McNeil**

**Bruce Thornton**

Postgame Press Conference

Purdue - 80, Ohio State - 66

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by the Ohio State Buckeyes. Coach Chris Holtmann, Isaac Likekele, Sean McNeil, Bruce Thornton, and Justice Sueing. Coach, opening statement?

CHRIS HOLTSMANN: Give Purdue credit. They've got a great team. Give them credit for the win. I think they've got an exciting future ahead of them in the tournament play.

Really proud of our guys. Just really proud of our fight. We didn't play perfect today, but they fought and gave ourselves a chance.

**Q. For Justice and Bruce, what will you ultimately take from this season, a season with some really difficult moments but then you played well late and this very well could be the end of it. Is this going to be a season you look back on fondly? Is this going to be a season you think of the negative more than the positive. What's this going to be for you two?**

JUSTICE SUEING: I think the biggest thing I'll take away from this is that we finished it off the right way. We had our ups and downs through the season. We had a lot of downs, especially to start off the year 2023.

What's important is we were able to finish it strong together. We had our best play of basketball this past month-and-a-half, and I'm just really proud of the guys. I'm



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really proud of my teammates.

BRUCE THORNTON: We just showed what we were capable of playing. We didn't show our true character throughout the season. We went through a drought where we didn't play our best. At the end, we picked it up, and we were playing our best basketball.

We just showed people we didn't quit. We kept fighting till the end. We played a good Purdue team. Give our hats to them. At the end of the day, I love our guys, love the coaches, love the fans. So I'm so proud of them.

**Q. Isaac, I know we talked to you a little bit about you said you hadn't really reflected that much about this potentially being your final games of college basketball, but I wonder, through this experience and for you as well, Sean, were you guys able to soak some of that up? And how nice was it to go out with a surprising three-game winning streak there before this one?**

ISAAC LIKEKELE: Me personally, it really is, whenever that final buzzer went off, walking off the court, I'm just real appreciative of all the opportunities I've got, definitely for Coach Holtmann right here, the bond that we built in just a short amount of time.

Coach Holt, he's cared for me more than just as a basketball player. That's not something you find all around the country. Like I said, I'm just appreciative of everything in Ohio State. That's just me.

SEAN McNEIL: One thing I try to continue to keep at the forefront of my mind was to not take a second for granted. We come here and surprise a lot of people, and like Justice said, we finished it off the right way.

But to come here -- just the opportunities, not only here, but throughout my time in college basketball. Got to play on the biggest stage, some of the best venues in America, and two of the best conferences in the country, there's no doubt about that.

Reflected on it a little bit, but as of right now, it just hurts

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with my guys.

**Q. Isaac, what's it like to defend the big man? Like he just keeps going at you, and a couple times it looks like you had that task.**

ISAAC LIKEKELE: My competitive spirit, I mean, it's fun, but overall -- I don't really want to just talk about that too much. I feel like it's kind of skewed, kind of -- I don't know.

It's fun to compete, man, regardless. I just like to compete. That's how the game goes, man. Some things go your way. Some things don't. But it's fun to always compete, man, any time. Any time Coach Holt asks me to go out there and guard him, I just try my best, and that's all Coach Holt is looking for.

**Q. For the other three who just didn't speak about Roddy, it seemed in that first half he was in a different realm, I guess, just everything he was throwing up was going in. I don't know, maybe his week here, his season, what's really stood out about what you guys have seen out of him here towards the end?**

BRUCE THORNTON: Roddy one-on-one, it's like -- we all knew what Roddy was capable of doing the whole year, man. He just brought it out when we needed it the most. He had a great week. We all knew what Roddy is capable of doing, and I'm just glad everybody get to see from this year, and he's going to be more improved next year. So Roddy has a lot of stuff coming for him.

JUSTICE SUEING: Just being able to see him grow over these past couple weeks, just how fast he's been able to pick up on stuff and he's been able to get to it, especially during this Big Ten tournament. It shows the growth and progression he was able to make but also what's to come. Roddy is going to be a great player for Ohio State University.

**Q. I think you talked yesterday about wanting to show you belonged here. I know the goal was to get to tomorrow and win this thing. But to get those wins, to play Purdue the way you guys did, especially in the first half, do you feel like you accomplished that to some degree?**

JUSTICE SUEING: Yeah, I think we showed what Ohio State basketball is. We go out there and we compete. It doesn't matter who's on the other side. My guys brought it regardless of who we're playing. Purdue is a great team at the end of the day. They're Number 1 in the country.

We did our job by playing the right way, making the right plays, and leaving it all out there on the floor. With that, we

live with the results. So I love my guys, I love the coaches, and I'm just proud of our effort throughout this entire thing.

**Q. For Bruce, because of the four, you're the one that could be back next season. What needs to happen as a team so you don't have a stretch like you did this past year, and what are your thoughts on what comes next for you and what this off-season looks like for you?**

BRUCE THORNTON: Just getting better. Playing this year with these guys is just like showing an example how to lead, how to be that top player and lead and get wins.

It's just so hard in this league trying to fight back when you're in the hole so deep. So that's one thing I'm going to take away, we've got to do our work early and try to get the most wins as much as we can, try to get double byes, at least a single bye, instead of playing four games, get like at least three. It shows a real difference today.

At the end of the day, Purdue is a great team. I feel like the guys played hard. Next year I have to show the example to the new guys coming up how to play Ohio State basketball.

**Q. Chris, I know you said that fatigue, you weren't worried about it, the confidence can overcome that, but today it did look like a couple of guys, it looked like Bruce, just a little slower. It looked like McNeil just a little bit off with the shot. Did you see that? Is that a fair observation, or what's your take on it?**

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Yeah, it's fair. It's fair. I think Bruce in particular felt it. He said he felt it more today, much more today than he has any other game. They did a good job picking him up down the court trying to wear him down. Obviously they knew he played a lot of minutes the past three days.

Yeah, for sure. I think it wasn't just him. Felix felt it a little bit. I think all of them to a degree did, but certainly Bruce, Sean, Felix, I noticed it with those guys.

**Q. Coach, I know you said other postseason stuff would be a conversation for another time, but with it being one day before Selection Sunday and stuff like that, is there a case you'd like to state for you guys as an NIT team, or is that something you've even thought about right now? Is that something you'd like to do?**

CHRIS HOLTMANN: I have thought about it. We have some injuries beyond kind of what's public that make it difficult right now, to be quite honest with you, that we have to really get -- we have to get some of our guys back.

They're not significant, but they need to be tended to, and they need some time off. So that might answer your question.

**Q. What went into the decision to guard Edey one-on-one versus doubling or tripling?**

CHRIS HOLTMANN: We were trying to trap him. We just couldn't get there. He got it too deep a couple times, more than a couple times. Their ability, they do a great job obviously getting him the ball, but also he just plants in the paint and you can't move him. He just plants there, and he's immovable. Sometimes they'll do some ball screen actions, but it's too hard to get him out of the paint.

**Q. Did the fatigue also kind of play a part in that? Was it just that quickness, not being able to get to him?**

CHRIS HOLTMANN: I think we were really trying to pressure the ball, and we just couldn't get there. He caught it too deep at times when we got it. We took them out of some other actions, but their play after the play was him planting in the paint and then throw it to him, and they did a great job with it.

**Q. You likely then are looking at the end of the season here, the last time you'll play with these guys. What is going to stick with you from this season when you did have such a rough stretch for so long? Then you play well late, it's not enough to get you into the postseason. What's going to stick with you on this year?**

CHRIS HOLTMANN: I think I'll need some time to probably process that and think that through, and maybe I'll have a better statement after I have a chance to kind of process all that went into this year.

Certainly you leave here feeling really proud of how we competed, and yet we also recognize the struggles. So I need some time to process it.

**Q. Chris, is one of the keys here moving forward to next year, you talked about playing the right way, guys getting it. They can't forget it, though, right?**

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Yes.

**Q. Moving into next season, how do you manage that? Do you say remember what we did, just do it again? Because you've got a new crew coming in too.**

CHRIS HOLTMANN: We do. We have four new guys. Whether or not we add someone through the transfer portal or whatever. Yeah, I think it's valid.

We have to get that message. I think the benefit is we have some really important guys that have been through it that are now returning that can speak to the importance of that and can live it. I'm not saying we didn't last year, but it was just such a new group last year.

**Q. And you're saying trust is the key. Is that the key? Or does it also mean playing better defense, focusing on details, trusting the extra pass? Where do you rank those things?**

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Trust, I think, was the biggest thing offensively. Playing the right way and trusting each other and living with the result. I don't think we did that enough for long stretches.

The other points of being way more detailed, which we were in this last month, and playing to our strengths, which we certainly did in the last month but maybe didn't as early, I think all those are factors.

**Q. Coach Painter just said that you guys have a bright future and that teams may have gotten you guys this year, but that's going to come to a halt with what you guys have coming next year and how you finished the season. I know words don't help things, but hearing other guys, coaches yesterday talking about what you guys have done recently and what can come from this program, how much does that help just kind of you internalize the end of the season here?**

CHRIS HOLTMANN: It's a good thought. Tom's his own man. Whether or not I wanted him to say anything or not, no one's stopping him. I appreciate the fact -- those are two of the best coaches in the country, so I've got a ton of respect for them.

We've got work to do to put ourselves in position where we're not playing five games in five days or four games in four days. A couple of years ago when we played four games in four days and we lost to Illinois in overtime, I think we were tied for 4th but ended up getting that 5 seed, if I'm thinking right, and that double bye is a factor.

So we've got some work to do to eliminate some of the things that really ailed us this year, and that's probably my biggest focus. But certainly have massive respect for the opinions of those guys.

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