

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 11, 2023

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Penn State Nittany Lions Coach Micah Shrewsberry

Jalen Pickett

Seth Lundy

Kebba Njie

Postgame Press Conference

Penn State - 77, Indiana - 73

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by the Penn State Nittany Lions, Head Coach Micah Shrewsberry, Jalen Pickett, Seth Lundy, and Kebba Njie.

MICAH SHREWSBERRY: Indiana is a really good team. Trayce Jackson-Davis is a stud. Being from Indiana and being able to see him, like he played for Zach Hahn, who I coached at Butler, seeing him from high school all the way through, he's special. He's special.

For us to be able to play this way against this caliber team, I thought until a certain point towards the end of the game, I thought our defense was fantastic today. Just happy for these guys, proud of these guys. We get a chance to play again tomorrow.

Q. Jalen, you were able to back your way in quite a bit today. It looked like they kept throwing the same sort of defense at you. Were you at all surprised they didn't change up on you too much?

JALEN PICKETT: Yeah, they were kind of staying home on shooters. We played them earlier this year. We shot bombs away from three. So we kind of figured they were going to stay home, so I was really able to get into the gaps and get deep to where I wanted to to be able to just rise up and shoot it.

Q. You grabbed four offensive rebounds, the team got nine as a whole and you guys scored 12 points off of those. How hard is that to do against a team like Indiana?



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KEBBA NJIE: Offensive rebounding, in general, it's not easy at all, especially playing against someone like Trayce Jackson-Davis, All-American and all that. So every time I was going for my rebounds, I had a winning mentality. I wanted to just go out there and win.

Q. Jalen, you guys have now won three straight games in this tournament, and like Coach just said, you guys have an opportunity to play one more. What does it mean to you guys to be able to constantly overcome despite your lower seed?

JALEN PICKETT: Yeah, it's really important for us. We have a poster in our locker room saying believe, and I think our team is believing in us. We ended the regular season pretty well on a high note, and now we're showing it in the tournament. I feel like we're playing our best basketball right around now.

Q. Kebba, you dealt with a lot of physicality today from Trayce, Race, and everyone they have in the post. How do you feel physically, and how did this stack up against what you expected from those guys physically?

KEBBA NJIE: Honestly, I expected just like what they did, you know what I'm saying? They were very physical, and I was preparing for that too. Right now I feel great because we got the win. Later my body might be hurting and all that, but it's all good.

Q. For Seth or Jalen, they had that stretch in the second half where they rallied to tie it at 47, and then you guys pulled away right again after that. What does that stretch right after they came back to tie it at 47 say about you guys and your mental toughness around this time of year?

SETH LUNDY: That's just -- we've been dealing with that like this whole tournament. The game of basketball is all about runs, and they went on their run, and every time, every single time, we just huddle up and talk to each other and just bring the group back together.



We feel that we played three road games here. The crowd is always against us and stuff like that. I feel like these teams are closer to this location. So it's a road mentality. We won't let the crowd rattle us or nothing. We just stick together and keep fighting.

Q. Seth, Jalen, you guys have been through so much over the course of not just this season, but last season as well. What does it mean to you guys to have this Big Ten season be ending with a chance to play for a championship?

JALEN PICKETT: It's really special. We felt like throughout the whole year we've seen guys putting in work, and we all talked about what kind of team we can be when we're all on the same page and we're all playing together.

To be standing here right now in this moment is kind of refreshing, but it kind of makes us more hungry because we want to go out and finish what we started.

Q. Jalen, when you guys were -- things got a little nervy there at the end. Was there any change of mentality for you guys, or what happened that kind of allowed that, and how did you recover in the end?

JALEN PICKETT: They turned up the heat a little bit with the press. We've got to clean up that a little bit, so I'm sure we're going to walk through some things there. We've just got to learn how to finish games.

We're not perfect, but we're going to watch film, review that, and we'll be better for tomorrow.

Q. Jalen, you guys obviously are one of the best teams in the country at not only three-point shooting but percentage of points from three. What is it about your offense that gives you guys the ability to be this productive this consistently?

JALEN PICKETT: Dude draws up great plays for us, and we shoot a bunch of open shots. So when you get open looks, it's amazing. It builds confidence, and once you do that, we're really good players too and we all work on our game.

You seen Seth last time. Once he's in a rhythm, he can shoot from anywhere. And Funk shoots from anywhere regardless. Whether he's warming up or not, he shoots from anywhere.

Q. Where are you guys physically as a team? You touched on it a little bit, but the challenge of playing four games in four days, how are you prepared for that? And what do you think you have to do between

now and the next game to get where you need to be?

JALEN PICKETT: It's a championship game. Nobody's tired. Nobody's fatigued. It feels like day one coming up. We're going to get in with Justin, our trainer, and do some treatment and stretching. We have a routine going at the hotel, so we're going to get on top of that.

Q. Coach, Hood-Schifino, 4 of 13 from the field. You guys really shut him down. What are some things you did to prepare for him, and how do you feel like you guys guarded him today?

MICAH SHREWSBERRY: I think our ball screen defense has been pretty good here recently. We're just trying to be aggressive, trying to be disciplined, trying to get guys in the tough spots. He's really good in the mid-range, and he makes a bunch of those shots, but we tried to bottle him up and always have somebody there to contest it when he got there and try to keep him away from the rim as much as possible, which is a tough task, all while trying to keep Trayce away from the rim.

I thought our rotations were really good. I thought we were pretty crisp. We're playing our best basketball right now.

Q. Coach, you had a little bit of free-throw trouble yesterday, but today you only missed three going 23 for 26. Did you guys talk about that at all after the game, or what do you think was different?

MICAH SHREWSBERRY: No, nothing. We're a really good free-throw shooting team. The first couple games, they weren't us, so I didn't even mention it. I didn't even talk about it. I just let these guys play.

They step up and make shots. That's what they do. They work on their games. They step up and make shots under pressure, no matter what happens. My college coach, Mike Beitzel, texted me last night and said don't talk about it either. So I follow his orders at all times.

Q. Forgive me, I'm sort of asking for trade secrets a little bit here. When you play Indiana, it's twice now, you seem to be really to switch them into some disadvantageous defensive matchups. I know they play two bigs most of the time, so maybe that's part of it. What allows you as a team to spread them out to get them in the situations where they're not where they want to be defensively?

MICAH SHREWSBERRY: We do it to everybody. It's not just Indiana. It's how we play. It's how we play. We play off a lot of movement. We play off a lot of screens, and then we get to a certain point in the game where we just

hunt matchups.

I believe in our guys and what they're able to do. So Pickett can get the matchup he wants, go to the post. Cam can get the matchup and ISO it. Seth can do the same thing, Kanye. We've got a bunch of different guys that can make plays one-on-one, but it also forces you to, if those guys are beating somebody off the dribble, we've either got to help or get the layup. Now once you help, we're kicking that ball out. Now you're chasing us around, and we're spraying it around, and that's where we get a bunch of our threes.

Q. When Jalen went into the portal, what was it about him that you liked, number one? And after you had him for a year last year, how did you change your offense to really utilize his strengths?

MICAH SHREWSBERRY: It was really important for me trying to build a program, guards win. Really good guards can win. He was one of the best guards in the portal. So we had to try and find somebody.

After watching him, looking at his numbers, talking to him, he was such a smart player. His basketball IQ is really high. He loves the game of basketball. Which is like -- I'm 46, but when I was on the bus riding with my teammates, that's all we were talking about is basketball. Kids are different these. Not everybody is talking about basketball on bus rides. Jalen Pickett is.

He watches whatever game is on TV, college, pro, whatever. He works on his game all the time. He loves the game. He's got a high basketball IQ. Whatever situations come or he's seen different defenses, he can handle them and adjust during the game without us having to call a timeout and instruct him what to do. I think that's the biggest thing. He's so smart. He understands the game, and he loves it, and he wants to be really good, and he wants to win.

Q. Coach, you've gone on this unbelievable run. Going in tomorrow's game, you're playing against Purdue in the championship against Matt Painter, a guy you've asked for advice and coached with before. What's your thought going up against him?

MICAH SHREWSBERRY: It's never fun because they beat our brains in every single time we've played them. But like it's the friendliest of rivalries that he's a guy that I call and I talk to all the time, and despite us being in the same league, we're talking about things throughout the year. We're helping each other. He's helping me.

So I'm always indebted to him. I owe a lot of gratitude to

him. He showed me, in my years there, how to run a college basketball program, how to do it the right way, how to recruit the kids that fit your system. So it's fun. It will be a great challenge. We got to be ready. We got to be physical. We got to play good offense.

But we're going to fight. We're going to compete. That's what I love about our guys.

Q. I'm going to debunk what you said just a little bit because Matt had said earlier this year, a lot of what they run are things that they took from you that you brought from Butler, that you brought from the Celtics. Zach was up here earlier saying he wouldn't be where he is if you hadn't helped develop him as a freshman. How much do you see your footprints on that program and what it's done?

MICAH SHREWSBERRY: I don't know about that. They're just being nice. That's his program. He's been doing great things for so long, like I just wanted to be a small part of it. Brantley is putting in the real work with Zach.

But those are my guys, man, players and coaches. But I know, like the -- how we are, like we're going to go after each other. We're going to go after each other. Then when it's over, then we'll be back to friends.

Like they run really good stuff. We got to be good defensively. We've got to be really good defensively. We've got to score so we can have some confidence.

Q. Micah, you touched on how much of a matchup nightmare Trayce is. What does it say about Kebba and Myles fighting him for 40 minutes and having such a strong performance today?

MICAH SHREWSBERRY: I was so impressed with Kebba. Like he starts games, and he doesn't always play big minutes because we downsize a lot, but ever since we lost at Nebraska, he had like four or five offensive rebounds there. We're 363 in the country in offensive rebounding.

But something flipped the switch for him right there. Maybe it was the first time through the league and the physicality that he had to play with and the effort, and he totally flipped the script. Since that game, he's been lights out. Like he might not always score. He might not always do things. He might still mess things up. But he's been going to the glass. He's been getting us extra possessions, and those have been huge. He battled. He fought down there in the post.

I'm just happy for him, man. He probably has no idea what

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he just did and who he was guarding.

Q. It was reported today that you're one of the leading candidates at Georgetown, that Notre Dame is interested. Have you or your agents spoken to any of those programs, and can you comment on those reports?

MICAH SHREWSBERRY: You know me. I'm like basketball season is going on, I am completely tunnel vision on our team and State High basketball. I missed my kid's game today. They won by 40. Shout out State High. Moving on, Little Lions. Moving on to the state tournament.

That's what I'm focused on. I'm happy to be here. Nobody wanted me a few years ago. I'm happy to be here. I love our guys. We're going to prepare to play for a championship tomorrow.

Q. Coach, how do you separate -- we talked earlier about Matt Painter, but how do you separate the fact that you guys are going for a championship, but yet this is a friend, this is a colleague, this is somebody who hasn't won since 2009 and you're in the way. How do you separate that?

MICAH SHREWSBERRY: It's easy because we're both competitors. I'll see him in the hallway, and we'll joke and we'll laugh and we'll shake hands when they announce our names, and then tooth and nail we're going to fight each other. We both love to win. We both hate to lose. So in that moment, that's all we're focused on. That's all we're focused on.

I would love it if he felt a different way and was like, hey, why don't you guys go ahead and win. We're not going to show up tomorrow. (Laughter).

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