

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Maryland Terrapins

Kevin Willard

Jamie Kaiser Jr.

Jahmir Young

Postgame Press Conference



Maryland - 65, Rutgers - 51

THE MODERATOR: For Maryland, we're joined by head coach Kevin Willard, along with Jahmir Young and Jamie Kaiser Jr.

KEVIN WILLARD: Really, really pleased with the way we bounced back. Obviously the last couple games defensively we hadn't been what we were all season. These guys, I challenged them to come back defensively, and they answered the bell and were great defensively.

Q. Jahmir, how much of an emphasis was there on getting started quickly? You opened up an 11-0 run, hit your first three three-pointers. How much confidence did that give you guys?

JAHMIR YOUNG: We opened up hitting shots early, just trying not to give them life. Just being able to bounce back, like Coach said, was huge for us. Guys stepping up and just defending, trying to run them off the three-point line.

We did a good job of staying in front and staying in control all game.

Q. Jamie, when those first couple of threes fall, how does it help you guys open up the rest of the offense?

JAMIE KAISER JR.: It definitely opens up. Paid for Ju to go to work down there, and driving lanes for DeShawn and Jahmir. Just helps the team.

Q. Jahmir, after that hot start, what allowed you guys to keep the lead at double digits throughout the rest of the game and never dwindle down past eight?

JAHMIR YOUNG: Just continue to share the ball. Find the open man. It started on defense. Being able to limit them to one shot and getting out in transition where we're finding success. Just limit them to one shot, so we can get out and run.

Q. For either of you. Defensively the past two games against Rutgers you've had a lot of success. What do you think has contributed most to that?

JAHMIR YOUNG: Just being able to be connected defensively, limit them to three-point shots. They're not the greatest shooting team.

So being able to stay locked in, stay packed in on the defensive end and being in gaps was huge. They had a hard time with that.

Q. What was the difference in your defense today versus what it was against Penn State? What kind of efforts did you guys have in the last couple of days to make sure you were playing the type of defense they did for most of the season?

JAHMIR YOUNG: I mean, it really started in practice. Just we had really good days in practice. We're getting back to what we do well.

We slipped on that Penn State, so just being able to get back to the basics and just trying to stay connected on defense, stay in front of our man, guard one-on-one, and limit them to one shot.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach Willard.

Q. Kevin, having JuJu back, obviously how much of a difference does that make, huge in your lineup today?

KEVIN WILLARD: I think the biggest thing is JuJu practiced -- we got back late on Sunday, and I brought him back in -- I brought the team back really early the next day, and Ju is a great leader. He showed me that he was all right.



Again, I'm always extra cautious, especially as many minutes as he's played. So having him back -- again, he's one of the best centers in the country. So when you have that scoring threat, passing threat, defensively he helps us, and he locks down so many different ways. It was huge.

Q. Is there anything that specific that you wanted to take advantage of on defense against Rutgers' offense?

KEVIN WILLARD: Rutgers is a lot like us. There's times where they really struggle to shoot the ball, and they run good stuff. But there's times where you've just got to pack it in on them at times and just try to make them make threes.

I thought the last two times we've played them, our guys have done a really good job of understanding the scouting reports and personnel because it's more of a personnel game. Just because they're so good at driving the basketball. Williams is so good at driving the basketball. Just making it hard for them to drive.

Q. Coach, getting back to JuJu on the defensive end especially, what does he kind of provide that was missing at Penn State?

KEVIN WILLARD: Just experience. Three years he's been in the league. He understands, he knows our drop coverage really well. He's a smart basketball player. So it makes life on everybody else a little bit easier.

And he's 6'10", he's physical, and he throws his body around, which really helps in this league.

Q. You mentioned flipping the switch at this time of the year. How much did you emphasize getting off to a fast start today? I know you mentioned defense in practice.

KEVIN WILLARD: We just talked about defense. I wanted to get off a fast start defensively, get some stops. We got two deflections. We got a fast break layup, then we got an open three off a turnover.

For me, when we've been good, it's been on the defensive end. We've struggled -- we had open shots all night. Unfortunately, just we've struggled to shoot the basketball at times, but our defense has kept us in every game. We've had seven losses by one possession.

So just keeping them -- it's hard in college basketball right now. Keeping these guys focused and keeping them understanding. They're frustrated and disappointed the way the season's ended, but just getting them to

understand how close we really were. It's not like we were getting blown out. It's not like we weren't in any games. We missed a free-throw, a layup here, a jump shot there, so it's four wins on one possession that -- everybody's a lot happier.

So just getting them to understand what made us good and get them refocused on that.

Q. You mentioned the open shots early. Just mentally what do you think it does for the guys when they hit those first four shots, get out to a huge lead, how does it help them on the defensive end of the floor?

KEVIN WILLARD: It just relaxes us. You can just see it. Believe it or not, you can see our body language just -- we've played better on the road than we have at home this year for some reason. I have no idea why.

It just seems like we've shot the ball better on the road, and these guys, it just relaxes them and gives them a chance to understand, okay, we're going to go play defense and get stops, and now we're scoring. Psychologically, it's just a big difference.

Q. I saw Jahari take a pretty hard spill at the end. Any idea --

KEVIN WILLARD: I have no update on that. I apologize. If we get one, I'll have John tell you.

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