

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Michigan Wolverines

Juwan Howard

Nimari Burnett

Terrance Williams II

Postgame Press Conference

Penn State - 66, Michigan - 57

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by University of Michigan head coach Juwan Howard, along with Terrance Williams II and Nimari Burnett. We'll start with an opening statement.

JUWAN HOWARD: I would like to give Penn State coaching staff and players the credit they deserve. They came out with a game intensity on the defensive end. Looking back to the first half with 11 turnovers they caused. They were very truly disruptive.

Overall I give our guys credit as well for how we defended on the defensive end, bringing that fight we prepared for leading up to this evening.

Unfortunately, we did not come out on the winning side, but I'm proud of every player that has been a part of this program this season, dealing with the adversity we dealt with, to be able to come out each and every night and give everything that we've asked.

With that being said, we'll open up to questions for our players.

Q. Terrance, your mid-range game was working for you all night. Did you happen to feel a little bit of a hot streak, maybe a green light from Coach Howard?

TERRANCE WILLIAMS II: Yeah, he drew up a play for me when I got the and one mid-range, but prior to that I hit a couple. Like you said, I was just feeling it today in the mid-range area because that's what they were giving me. They were running me off the line.



I was just going to take what the defense gave me, and it happened to be the mid-range today, and they were falling.

Q. Dug McDaniel was talking about how it feels like you guys have been out of sync since after the first couple of games of the season. I'm curious if you guys could comment on that and just assess kind of what went wrong over the last third of the season.

NIMARI BURNETT: I remember losing to Long Beach State earlier in the year, and I think winning that game kind of would have changed things. But it's how the season went throughout the time. Obviously there's some things that we needed to fix, and it was a bunch of things that we could have fixed along the way.

Overall, it was just tough to go through that as a team, go through that adversity, like Coach talked about. Overall it was just a tough season for sure.

Q. Terrance, Tarris and Will had their arms around you during that last timeout. Can you take us through the emotions and the game as a whole in that moment.

TERRANCE WILLIAMS II: They were hugging me and saying, thanks for everything. I spent three years with Will, two with T. Reed, and they were thanking me for everything I've done for them and helping them get better each day. It really hit home for me that I had that effect on people because I didn't know I had that effect on people until they told me.

It was a lot of emotions for me, just taking it all, these four years I've put on the maize and blue.

Q. What is this team's culture, and what is this team's MO? What is your identity of this program?

NIMARI BURNETT: I believe the culture is to come in every day and put in maximum effort, doing it as a team, as a group. It's really family oriented.

Even though this season didn't go the way we wanted it to, we all were bought in. I kind of said the other day it sucks, but this group has been connected. It's the most



connected eight and whatever how many losses team I've ever been a part of. I don't regret any time spent with these guys. They're like brothers to me.

It sucks, and we all went through it together. I feel like on the other side of it we'll become stronger men with higher character because of it.

TERRANCE WILLIAMS II: Coach always talk about the culture being a family. I feel that's where we were this year. You probably don't see that on the court, but I feel like we were a family off the court.

We were all in. We were disciplined each day. We had accountability each day in practice. Like I said, you don't see it, but behind closed doors, I feel like our culture is good. I feel like Coach Howard is doing a good job, and he's going to continue to do a good job to lead us young men to be better on the court and off the court.

Q. You guys were down 11 at halftime, but came out really strong in the second half. What kind of was said at halftime? What do you think helped get that energy for you guys?

NIMARI BURNETT: I just think in the first half we had a slow offensive -- just a slow offensive first half. Mixing that we weren't getting some stops beginning of the second half like we were getting in the first half, with our offensive game flowing and guys making shots.

It was a game of the ball didn't go in the first half, and it's due now. You're due for your next one. So T. Will came up and hit some big shots, T. Reed was working in the paint. Dug started to get things going. So that's kind of what got us going in the beginning of the second half.

Q. Juwan, I know you were asked this maybe six weeks ago, but I was wondering do you have the same answer: Do you still intend and want to coach this team next season?

JUWAN HOWARD: My answer hasn't changed.

Q. Have you had any conversations with Warde Manuel or any other Michigan administrators about the future?

JUWAN HOWARD: No, I have not. We just played the game. There are a lot of emotions right now at this moment for players and coaches. We did not want to lose this game tonight, but it so happens that's what happened.

We'll go back home and sit down and meet, me and players. Then I'm sure the athletic department will want to

sit down and talk. I'm looking forward to having those type of conversations.

Q. With respect to how quickly this just ended and those conversations, I guess what would your pitch be to continue on? Is it the success that you've had, or is it maybe since there has not been success in recent years, you have a plan to change things?

JUWAN HOWARD: Well, I say this out of respect. I didn't know I was being interviewed at this time. When you say the word "pitch" because then that means I of course have to be able to pitch what you had touched on.

At this time, man, we lost a tough game. This is a heart breaker for me and my entire staff, as well as players. So it's going to be tough to sleep tonight for all of us.

Q. Juwan, are you confident that this can get turned around, that you can turn this around, that you still have the pieces in place to turn it around?

JUWAN HOWARD: There are going to be a lot of decisions made when the season ends -- obviously the season just ended. We'll regroup tomorrow, and we will sit down and talk as a staff on our needs, our wants. At the same time, we're going to do a great job -- I trust we will do a great job in executing that plan.

Q. I know you've been asked this a million times too, but you still fully health-wise and everything else want to be back, plan to be back?

JUWAN HOWARD: Health-wise, just two weeks ago I started to turn the corner and started to feel a lot better. My mobility, getting out of bed improved. Sleep improved. My conditioning level as I was going through -- and I still go through rehab three days a week -- has improved. My health is truly improving day in and day out.

I look forward to coaching next year.

Q. Warde Manuel quoted effort a lot this year from your team when discussing your future. Nimari Burnett just quoted the effort of this team. At what point does effort turn into tangible efforts?

JUWAN HOWARD: When you think back to some of the adversity we faced starting with injuries -- not making excuses, but this is reality. You look at injuries to key guys. This was touched on just recently, the last four weeks of our season losing Olivier, one of our best players on our team.

You look at the time when we lost, not having our point

guard. And as we were clawing and scrapping, not making excuses during that process, understanding, yes, those situations that happened, we have to take ownership of it and grow with it.

Then you look at the fact that with the change of a new roster, you lose one of your best players to the transfer portal, that's Hunter Dickinson. Then you also lose two NBA players, first round picks, one being a lottery pick. The other one just one pick off being in the lottery.

It's challenging of course building a roster, you have to reinvent yourself. Like I said before, not making any excuses for it, and sure enough, we did not. At the same time, you don't plan on the adversity that we faced. You're hoping that you have a little luck within this sport because truly luck plays a major role.

For us, we didn't have that luck. Overall, I really appreciate our guys night in and night out, every time that we pushed them to get uncomfortable, they allowed us to and accepted it.

Then at the same time, we learned a lot from them and who they are. You heard it from our two players that was here earlier. They talked about being all in because of our culture, and our culture, that's what we have. We've instilled a culture since day one, since I've been a head coach here, and we will not waver from it, no matter what college basketball and the rules with college basketball has thrown at us. We will stick to the culture because we understand what works.

We're going to, like I said earlier, regroup when I get back, and we're going to figure out what's best for this program moving forward.

Q. Coach, first of all, we're praying for you that your health will improve.

JUWAN HOWARD: Thank you, brother. I appreciate that.

Q. There's three Black coaches in this conference and throughout the season. Each one of you has been put on a hot seat by the white media. I'm hoping that you survive this because we know Black coaches sometimes don't. But can you speak on just the fact that the three of you are doing the job that you've been hired to do, representing as coaches. There was Black kids in the stands today that got to see you coach and will see the other two Black coaches during this tournament. Can you just speak on that.

JUWAN HOWARD: Well, I got into coaching because I remember how my coaches impacted me as I grew. When

I touched -- let's call it what it is. When I first touched campus on the University of Michigan, how Steve Fisher and his staff helped me in so many ways to become a graduate student at one of the prestigious universities, speaking of the University of Michigan.

Coming as a kid from the inner city, being the first in my family to receive my degree. Promising my grandmother, no matter what, my goal is to make it to the NBA and take care of our family, but I promise you I'm going to get my education to inspire my family members and also others that come from our community that they can do the same thing.

Now fast track, this is, I've always said to you guys, a dream job to be able to impact these young men, to encourage them, to grow with them, to teach them how to come from a young man to a man during some of these uncomfortable times in our society.

I relish the fact that, yeah, there are always going to be moments where everyone's entitled to their opinion. I'm not going to please everyone. But I'm going to, of course, roll up my sleeves and be inspired to work hard every day to make sure that I'm responsible to do a job to help our university be proud of a winning culture. We're going to get back to that, and that's my goal, and I'm going to stick to it.

There have been coaches that have really inspired me to go out and do something special during this college game, and I look back to the John Thompsons of the world. I also am inspired by the Mike Jarvises of the world and many others.

Q. Kind of picking up on your answer from the question before, whether you win one game or 30 games, there are always moments that every coach remembers most fondly about each team. What will be those moments that you'll remember about this group?

JUWAN HOWARD: Yeah, great question. I would say on how our young men took on adversity during some uncomfortable moments and how they, of course, rallied together during that.

We could have easily had a team that separated themselves, because it is truly uncomfortable when you have a plan of you want to be dancing in March. You want to also be the last team standing. And when you don't achieve those goals, that's when tough adversity hits.

With our group, I've seen how the adversity where we've rallied behind one another. This started from the beginning when I went out with my injury. My players calling on me, checking on me in the hospital, sending me wonderful text

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

messages. My staff all hands on deck stepping up to help prepare our team every day in practice, at the same time sending me flowers, their families checking on me, making sure that my health is good.

Then we could have easily just said, you know, this is not for us. But everything you want is on the other side of hard. I really believe that this has been a learning year, but it's been a year that we've all really joined together. That's when family has been tested, and I feel family has stepped up and supported one another when family needed one another.

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