

# Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 14, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

## Ohio State Buckeyes

## Jake Diebler

## Bruce Thornton

### Postgame Press Conference

Ohio State - 90, Iowa - 78

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Ohio State, Coach Jake Diebler, along with Bruce Thornton.

JAKE DIEBLER: Obviously really proud of just how connected our team was on both sides of the ball. I thought we made some really good adjustments at halftime defensively. They're a really, really talented team. They have some veterans who are capable of having big nights and certainly really well coached.

So we knew this was going to be a 40-minute game that we knew they were capable of going on big runs. But I wanted to stay aggressive. I felt like our guys stayed together and stayed aggressive for 40 minutes.

**Q. Bruce, what's it like playing for this guy, the ball of energy next to you, to just see the excitement out of him at what you guys are doing on the court?**

BRUCE THORNTON: He's one of the reasons I came to Ohio State. Playing for this guy last year and this year have been fun. It's been an exciting roller coaster of events.

You couldn't tell me that my two years of college were going to be like this, but I'm glad it panned out like this. We're winning games. Everybody is connected. So everything is good right now.

**Q. Bruce, you hit a couple of three-pointers right at the beginning of the game. How good did that feel? Did that kind of put your mind at ease that it's going to be a good day? What's going through your mind when you're getting out early, I guess?**

BRUCE THORNTON: It felt good, especially from last



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year. My first shot was an air ball. My first shot went in this time. So I was excited.

How Iowa was playing me, they was heavy in my gaps. So a lot of my teammates, I had to hit the wide open guy and they made shots tonight. When a guy hits shots like that, it's really easy on offense. To get stops, that's why we came out with a win today.

**Q. You guys went on an run in the tournament last year in Chicago. Do you feel like the same vibes are starting to pop up with this team right now? What are you thinking, I guess? What's going through your mind as you're one game in what could be four?**

BRUCE THORNTON: Sure. We're trying to win the whole game, but we're trying to take it one game at a time. Tomorrow we have to go 1-0 again. We did it today. We had great preparation and great attention in our walkthrough at the hotel.

Tonight we got to make sure we get our body in recovery. Do the same thing tomorrow, go 1-0, and keep advancing.

**Q. Coach, you're the coach at the Ohio State University. You've got these guys playing at the highest level. What does it mean to you to lead these guys?**

JAKE DIEBLER: I haven't really spent a lot of time to step back and think about that, but when you put it that way, it's almost like living a dream right now. I think the circumstances certainly are unfortunate. Coach Holtmann means so much to me personally, and he's had a great influence on me as a coach and as a person.

But the easy part in this has been, when I met with Gene Smith and we discussed kind of how to do this, he gave me great advice. Just it's about the players.

So that's why I got into coaching, was to be able to connect with guys and help them grow both on and off the court. So that part was really easy and natural for me, and that's been my focus. Serving our players and this program has meant so much to me and my family, because of our family

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history with this program, that's been the focus.

**Q. Jake, you guys were on such a roll there, four straight to end the regular season. Was there any hesitation, any thought, are we going to carry this over to the postseason? And you guys more than answered that. What was kind of your thought about carrying it over?**

JAKE DIEBLER: Yeah, I didn't have any thoughts because of the leadership of this team and how connected our guys have been really every day in practice. That gave me great confidence that we were going to come out and play and continue to play how we've been playing.

We've talked about it. We still have to get better. We still have to try to have longer stretches of aggressiveness on both sides of the ball and just maybe a higher level communication. I thought our communication wasn't as good as it needed to be in the first half, but our guys, they responded.

No, Steve, I didn't have any doubts because of our leadership and how connected our guys have been.

**Q. Just one other thing I want to ask. Everybody seems to believe coming into this that you get two wins, you have a really good chance of making the tournament. I know you're concerned about the basketball, and every day putting out your best effort and everything. What would that mean tomorrow if you're able to beat a great team like Illinois and position yourselves a little bit better perhaps?**

JAKE DIEBLER: It would mean a great deal. Listen, when this happened back in the middle of February, we talked about just the opportunity that was in front of us, and our guys have earned the right to embrace how meaningful these games are.

So we're not shying away from what's at stake, but we're able to do that because of how mature our group is, and they understand that, in order to keep going, we have to focus on the task at hand, and we have to continue to get a little tougher, a little more together, and sustain our urgency and aggressiveness for as long as we can and keep pushing for a 40-minute game of those things.

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