

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 15, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Wisconsin Badgers

Greg Gard

A.J. Storr

Steven Crowl

Postgame Press Conference

Wisconsin - 70, Northwestern - 61

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by the University of Wisconsin. We'll start off with an opening statement from Coach Gard followed by questions for Steven and A.J.

GREG GARD: Obviously, completely different type of game than yesterday in terms of we had to really gut it out, dig in defensively after not a great start. But I thought these two guys and the guys in the locker room did a phenomenal job of buckling down and really turning the screws defensively, and they were able to make shots.

Obviously Steve hitting some big threes that kept separation. A.J., after the first few possessions, he figured out playing off two feet was really, really good and got to the rim, got to the free-throw line.

Just across the board, between foul trouble and guys a little banged up here or there, a terrific team effort. Kamari, John, Max. I mean, everybody gave us quality minutes. Just excited to be able to keep on playing.

Q. Steve, you've been really conservative in the three-point attempts you've taken this year. What's led to the increased attempts the last couple games?

STEVEN CROWL: Like I said yesterday, Coach has done a great job about being on me about being aggressive and getting them up because I'm shooting a pretty good percentage this year. And I've got to give credit to the guards. They do a great job of finding me, whether it's on the throwbacks or on the ball screens or whether I'm spotting up, they do a great job of giving me the ball in those spots.



So I've got to give credit to the coaches and the guards for sure.

Q. A.J., today not only did you have the 30 points, a career high, but you also played 35 minutes, the most you've kind of played in a month. Did you expect to kind of have a bigger role with Chucky's status and the way the game was going early on?

A.J. STORR: I just came into the game. Chucky told us before the game he wasn't playing, so that kind of motivated us all to play harder. I ended up playing 35 minutes. I didn't know, but it went great.

Q. You guys kind of dominated points in the paint today. How key was the battle inside for getting the win today?

STEVEN CROWL: I think like Coach said, it was a completely different game than yesterday where every three we shot was going in.

We knew today we would have to match their physicality, and that started, like you said, on the inside. I think for the most part we did a good job of finishing when we got in there and got to the line a little bit also.

Q. A.J., when you're having games like this, what's going on through your head?

A.J. STORR: Just to keep going till the clock hits zero. Keep going.

Q. How different did you feel the game was inside and outside without Ty Berry and Matt Nicholson?

STEVEN CROWL: Obviously they're both great players. They add a great element to their team, and it hurts losing guys like that as, if we lost some guys, it would hurt too.

Like Coach said, we just had to go out there with who we had and who they had and play a full 40 minutes, and we did that today.

Q. I saw you guys had a giant speaker before the



game. Do you do that every game? Is that a ritual? Does that motivate you guys?

A.J. STORR: I think we're going to start doing that every game now.

Q. Greg, you mentioned yesterday you felt like this team had been trending in the right direction the last week and a half or so. Is there a particular spark or something that you noticed that got this team back on the right track?

GREG GARD: I think getting healthy was a big piece of it. Obviously we have -- the stars have been in different parts of our team throughout the year. We've had Chucky have big games, Max has had big games, A.J. had one today, John had one yesterday.

I've always felt the real strength of this, the ace of this team has been their depth, and albeit just minute numbers maybe on a score sheet or a stat sheet, that spark comes from specifically Kam and John. So I think by getting those guys back, it's added an element of obviously excitement and enthusiasm to the locker room knowing that we're back full throttle with all of our pieces.

And I think we've also weathered the storm. You buckle down when things don't go your way and continue to learn and grow and stay positive and stay aggressive. I think that was the biggest thing is we -- the last two weeks, I think we've gotten much more aggressive on both ends of the floor.

Part of that is those two guys being back and having a full rotation, but I think there's -- and I feel for Chris and Northwestern because I know how they were humming with Nicholson and Berry, and you have those type of injuries, really you can plug other guys in, but it really disrupts what you spent months trying to build, even back through the summer.

Fortunately, we had guys that could step up today and help when we had some foul trouble.

Q. Greg, what would it have taken for Chucky to have to try to play today? Second part, Kamari McGee, could you address the block he had in transition, how important that was at that point in the game.

GREG GARD: Yeah, I didn't know he could jump that high, talking about Kamari. He even surprised me coming from there.

I was told Chucky tried to get it to go a little bit and tried to warm up. Then I was told about 30 minutes before the

game that he wasn't going to -- he said he couldn't go. Obviously the health of our guys is always first and foremost, so I completely leave that up to our trainers and our medical people.

Kam, it's another example of somebody stepping up and really helping. That play was huge. I'll have to watch that when I get back to the hotel.

Q. Coach, would you speak about Max Klesmit's impact in the game today and the absence of Chucky, how he was able to facilitate with seven assists and impact the game that way, please.

GREG GARD: Yeah, we've had to use him at point before, and he does a good job of -- it's a little different pace that we play with, but he does a good job of finding people.

I thought, after we made a couple of mistakes on Buie early, there was maybe one mistake we made in the second half when we didn't get up and get into the ball screen. Max, I think, and Kam and even John got a better feel because that was a pretty quick adjustment when we knew Chucky couldn't play, that somebody else was going to get the lion's share of the work on Boo.

Max, he's a warrior. He's got a huge heart, and he's gutty, and he's a competitor. That showed today.

Q. Another injury note, Tyler obviously was hurt. What was your read on that? How was he able to cut through that?

GREG GARD: I think he -- I don't know exactly what happened. He just said, hey, Coach, get me a few more breaks. We just kept talking about that, if he wanted a couple more minutes. He was kind of telling me when to pull him in and out and when he needed a break.

Like I said, it's March. If you don't have something that hurts, you haven't played hard enough. So guys continue to fight through the things that are going on, and other guys continue to step up.

Q. You alluded to it a little bit in your opening statement, but when A.J. is attacking the defense like that, especially around the rim, what type of pressure does that put, and how does it open up jump shots, not only for him, but for Steve and the team as well?

GREG GARD: It's an element that's been really good to us all year, when he gets in there and plays under control and off two feet. I think it took him a couple reps early to figure it out. It's been an ongoing process throughout the year of just continuing to help him understand, when he plays off

two feet, your percentages go up, and you get fouled more.

So fortunately for us, he learned really quick in that first half like, hey, I've got to get in here and draw contact and play off two and finish these. Obviously when you get to a situation where we have the floor spread like we do and shooters in a lot of places, it creates opportunities for him to make plays.

John does that as well, a little different way that he gets there. Obviously he was really -- you look at his numbers, he's really efficient. 10-of-16, we've seen numbers that haven't been efficient, and the reason is because he took good shots. I don't think we took very many, if any, bad shots.

Q. John Blackwell made his first career start today. Didn't really show up too much in the stat sheet but had a huge three down the stretch, kind of put the game away, and was kind of playing real hard all 40 minutes. Could you talk about his performance today.

GREG GARD: He fouled too much. That's why he didn't play as much as maybe I would have anticipated. Yeah, 24 minutes. The foul trouble kept him on the bench somewhat.

But John's not a freshman. I keep getting asked about him a lot and other media outlets about a freshman, and I was like he's grown up. He understands no moment is too big for him. He enjoys playing with his teammates.

Yesterday he was kind of front and center, front stage for us. Today he had a different role. That's the neat part about this team is that we're not dependent on one or two specific people. We have a lot of places we can go for production.

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