

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 15, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Northwestern Wildcats

Chris Collins

Boo Buie

Brooks Barnhizer

Postgame Press Conference

Wisconsin - 70, Northwestern - 61

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Northwestern University head coach Chris Collins, along with Boo Buie and Brooks Barnhizer.

CHRIS COLLINS: Obviously congratulations to Wisconsin. They were deserving of winning today. Terrific performance from Storr and Crowl. Not having Hepburn, I thought those guys really stepped up.

We got off to a great start. Boo hit some big shots. I thought our defense early in the game was really good. Then that run kind of in the middle part of the first half is when the game flipped a little bit. That 14-0 run, whatever it was.

They were able to get to the basket. They hit a couple of shots. Storr started getting going.

Then the second half, every time we tried to put pressure on them and make a run, they just answered with a big shot or a big drive.

It was two really good teams playing. They got the better of us today. It's disappointing. We came here with the idea of trying to make a run at this tournament. Unfortunately, it's a disappointing loss today, and we have to get home and get ourselves rested up and see what's next for us this weekend.

Q. For Boo, any questions about a lingering injury to your knee? I know you went and talked to the trainer. Is there any long-term scenario there?

BOO BUIE: I'm all right. I just got hit in the knee. I'm all



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right.

Q. Brooks, how would you evaluate your performance?

BROOKS BARNHIZER: I definitely didn't play a great offensive game, but I think the beauty of this game and the beauty of this March is whatever position we put ourselves, we have a chance to come back out and play again.

We have to learn from this, come back, and go get the next one.

Q. Boo, you hit seven threes today. A lot of them felt like give your team to come back in the game. Did you feel there was any extra pressure in light of Wisconsin's defense and the way they played and other guys kind of not being able to make a shot today?

BOO BUIE: No. Like Brooks said, I just think that overall as a team we weren't ourselves, like we normally are. Like you said, we have more to play for, and we just got to -- we're going to have to go back home and get ready to play better next time.

Q. Brooks, you guys were in a similar situation last year, dropping the first quarterfinal game after a double bye. How do you guys put this behind you as you head into tournament play?

BROOKS BARNHIZER: I think kind of treat it the same way as last year. We kind of looked at that game, saw what we didn't do well. We knew that we had another opportunity ahead of us. So we kind of just got better from it. That's exactly what we're going to do this year too.

Q. Boo, after that under 12 break, you only took two shots the rest of the half. What off-ball adjustments did you see Wisconsin make with their defense to kind of keep the ball out of your hands?

BOO BUIE: Pretty much all the teams have been doing it, but they've been trying to send two to the ball or just really make me pass the ball. My teammates and coaches, we



... when all is said, we're done.®

talk about it all the time, if they're going to do that, we've just got to make them pay.

It's just me being patient and hitting other guys and them getting open shots or making the extra pass. We didn't really do a great job of that tonight, but like Brooks said, man, we're looking forward to the next game. Onto the next, and looking forward to making another run next tournament.

Q. Boo, you mentioned that you guys weren't yourself today. What makes you think that? What was different about today?

BOO BUIE: If you just look at our offense, especially in the first half. I just thought we got a little stagnant. We went up 21-10, and our offense was a little bit stagnant.

We've been a really good, efficient offensive team all year. That's what I mean. That just wasn't like us. We made a couple of bonehead plays defensively. I know how capable this team is, and I just didn't feel we were ourselves tonight.

Q. For either one of you, Wisconsin hit ten threes, six of them in the second half, and a lot of them seemed like they were fairly wide open. What was it that you think led to those defensive lapses, especially in the second half around the arc?

BOO BUIE: Yeah, like I said, we weren't ourselves. We had some breakdowns, some miscommunications, and it led to open threes. And they knocked them some, so credit to them.

We just weren't right, but we're going to go back home and we're going to get right.

Q. Coach, with this being the second straight year you dropped your opening game of the Big Ten tournament, how do you once again regroup the team heading into NCAAs?

CHRIS COLLINS: I think guys are excited to keep playing. There's a number of years where you lose in the Big Ten tournament game and the season might be over.

In this case -- I mean, we came here with great intentions. We really focused on -- we didn't know who we were going to play, so we had some great practices. I thought we were able to get fresher coming into the tournament.

We played a Wisconsin team that's been playing much better. Got off to a great start. Just our inability to get our other guys going. We really had Boo going early. He got

us off to such a good start.

But in order for us to win, Wisconsin is an NCAA Tournament -- we're going to be going to a tournament where everybody is really good. You need your complementary guys to be able to take some pressure off your best guy.

We just didn't knock down the shots today. I actually thought we were getting some good looks. Wisconsin played good defense on some of those, but I thought Brooks got some really good looks. I thought Nick Martinelli got the shots he normally gets. I thought Ryan Langborg got some good looks. He was in foul trouble the whole game and that really hurt us because we need his scoring.

But if you look at those three guys going 5-for-21 and 3-for-10, so 8-for-31, it's going to be really hard for us to beat an NCAA quality opponent if we go 8-for-31 with those three guys.

I thought we fought hard. We kept ourselves in the game even when it wasn't going well offensively and guys weren't scoring. We were hanging around. And then there were a couple critical possessions where in transition we got a couple of shots blocked. We ran out, got a dunk, got a shot on the other side. Give them credit. They're a good team. Obviously we had the same record this year. We're two very good teams, and they're an NCAA quality opponent, and this was a great test for us today.

Unfortunately, we weren't able to get the job done, so it's disappointing because we came here to try to win and try to advance and see if we can make a run this weekend.

Q. You guys have lost three of your last four games with no Matthew Nicholson. First, how would you assess any state of panic you might be feeling? On the secondhand, is there an update on Nicholson and his status moving forward?

CHRIS COLLINS: No panic. You look at those games that -- he got hurt in the Iowa game, which was a tough loss for us. He got hurt in the middle of that game. We went to Michigan State and, I thought, played very well, had a shot. Ryan Langborg gets a clean three that would have potentially won the game. I thought we played pretty well in kind of a rock fight type of game.

We came home and played great against Minnesota, who I think is a good team, and I thought we did some good things today. There's zero panic. We lost to a team that's going to be a 5 or 6 seed in the NCAA Tournament in a game we lose by nine, but we're winning 21-10, it's a

two-possession game in the middle of the second half.

There's zero panic. We believe we can win. We believe we're good. We believe we can compete with anybody we play against.

Last year it was a similar thing. We went out and played great against Boise. Got a good win and went out and almost beat UCLA.

Some of that stuff, depending who you play, when you play them, how they're played can be overanalyzed. We're still in a good spot. Our guys will get another week or so to get healthy. We'll either play Thursday or Friday and we'll watch some practices, and we'll be confident. We'll go into the tournament confident we can play and hopefully give ourselves a chance to advance no matter who we play.

Q. Coach, Brooks had 40 minutes, I want to say 14 rebounds as well. Do you feel his other responsibilities are kind of hurting his ability to make an offensive impact in a game like this?

CHRIS COLLINS: I don't. I just think he missed some shots. I think sometimes, when a guy misses -- he shot five threes. I thought they were all pretty wide open. They were good shots. I mean, he's a guy who's been a 40 percent three-point shooter. He just didn't make them today. It's part of the game.

He still got to the line eight times. He missed some shots around the basket he normally makes.

It's basketball. You look at the best players in the world, there's nights that great players go 3-for-15, or in the NBA sometimes, it's 6-for-25 or things like that. It happens. You don't make shots all the time.

He's played those minutes all year, guys. It's not -- we had a week off. We hadn't played since last Saturday. He's fine. You look at Wisconsin's minutes, Storr played 35, Klesmit played 35, Crowl played 32. Guys can play heavy minutes because there's long timeouts. Guys are in condition to play those kind of minutes.

He just had a tough night shooting the ball, and I want him to stay confident, same thing with Nick, same thing with Ryan. They've been great players for us all year long. It just was a night that collectively we couldn't get any of those three guys going, which was disappointing because Boo was amazing. Boo was, it's kind of fitting maybe his last Big Ten game he ever plays, the way he played like that on this stage, 29 points, 7 threes. He kind of did everything in his power to keep us in it, and we just weren't able to get the other guys going this afternoon.

Q. I'm going to try not to be too leading here. I was thinking watching Braden Smith limp off the court, it's a game Purdue doesn't need. You guys, you've got injuries. You've got starters playing almost 40 minutes. How much does this tournament even matter for you in the scheme of things? Is it not the worst thing to go home after one game?

CHRIS COLLINS: Look, in hindsight it's not the worst thing. The worst thing would probably be to play three games and lose in the championship because you get wiped out and then you've got to fly home and figure out who you're playing.

That being said, as a competitor, you don't view it that way. You come in -- I mean, we were really excited, really ready to play. We came here. We felt we had a great chance not being able to play until Friday.

Then when you lose a game, you kind of say, okay, let's get home. Let's dust ourselves off. Let's get back to the drawing board. We're still in a good spot. We were able to get through the game. The guys we do have -- you know, Ty's out. I apologize I didn't answer your question on that. No new update on Matt.

But we'll get ourselves ready. Like I told the guys, it's the one thing that's a positive is you can kind of learn from playing an opponent like today in a tournament environment, and you can kind of go home and say, okay, there are no more do-overs now. It's a one-and-done situation. We've got to get it right. We've got to be at our best.

Obviously the margin for error for us is very slim. When you lose some key guys, two starters, you can still win. Doesn't mean we can't win, but it makes the margin for error a little bit slimmer, with our defense, with our rebounding, with our turnovers, things of that nature that we have to really shore up before we head to next weekend.

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