

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 15, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Illinois Fighting Illini

Brad Underwood

Ty Rodgers

Dain Dainja

Postgame Press Conference

Illinois - 77, Ohio State - 74

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by the University of Illinois head coach Brad Underwood along with Dain Dainja and Ty Rodgers.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: The first thing I'd like to do is commend Coach Diebler on being in a really tough spot. His team could have very easily just decided to fold it up.

Got tremendous respect for Chris, but the job he did was outstanding. Got those kids to play really hard and rally. So I'd like to commend him and Ohio State.

Wasn't the prettiest game today. It was a postseason game. It was everything that you've got to fight through all in one.

It's not very often Marcus goes 3-for-16 and we're going to win. But these two guys right here, Dain goes 7-of-10, 8 rebounds, 18 points, was dominant in the post. Then I thought Ty, who's been playing off the chart, had a double-double, 10 points, 10 rebounds. Those guys were as impactful on the defensive end.

But a lot of grit, a lot of toughness. Being down 10, made some lineup changes at different times, and a night that -- Coleman wasn't great, but he came up with 5 offensive rebounds, some really big ones late, and then made a nice block late.

So a great team win, and it's survive and advance, which is what postseason play is all about.

Q. Ty, beginning of the second half wasn't going so well. Coach calls timeout. We saw what happened.



What was said, what sparked you guys to come back from that deficit?

TY RODGERS: I think we came out in the second half a little lackadaisical, but we withstood it, and we came together and found a way.

I think just at the timeout we kind of just talked to everybody within ourselves. We could feel the energy was down, and I think after that timeout, we were able to get a kill. We just brought energy from that point on.

So I think after that, the energy was high and we were ready to go win it.

Q. Dain, did you see this as a matchup that was favorable to you? They didn't double in the post. They went one-on-one with Okpara. Did you feel like you could have a good game today?

DAIN DAINJA: Yeah, I did. Okpara is very long and athletic. So I thought by going into his body a little bit more, I thought I would be a little bit more effective.

Q. Dain, this is your hometown. What was it like to be able to do this, and what are your biggest games ten miles where you're from?

DAIN DAINJA: Yeah, it feels good to be able to come back and play in front of a whole bunch of friends and family, coaches. It's just a good feeling to come back and be able to get a W.

Q. Dain, you kind of touched on having your friends and family here. What kind of extra boost does that give you just to have such an entourage here in support of you?

DAIN DAINJA: For me it's a little bit more motivation. I've got both of my parents here. That just means a lot to me. Then all my friends who supported me from day one. So it's just a good feeling. It gives me a little bit more energy.

Q. Ty, if anybody had any success on Thornton all night, it seemed to be you defensively. What was the



game plan, and what were you able to do to at least slow him down and make him take a tough two?

TY RODGERS: I think just me be able to curl up in him. I think Coach has been on me the last few weeks. I used to give a lot of space on defenders. And he wanted me to curl up on guys. I think, when I curl up on guys, I'm a pretty good defender. Coach always preaches that to me.

So my thing was just being aggressive with him and curling up on him and taking him where I want to go.

Q. Dain, what's it like to do what you did out there, knowing you're good enough to do that. You don't always get to play as big a role in the game. Sometimes you do, and sometimes you don't. But to be in March and have your head up and do that, what's that experience like for you?

DAIN DAINJA: It's just about staying positive and bringing good energy to the team. I don't want to be a downer to the team. I always want to bring good energy, make the guys laugh a little bit. Just doing those little things and just doing whatever it takes to win. That's what's most important.

Q. Dain, multiple times down the stretch you powered through the contact for those and-ones. What was the emotion like making those buckets, heading to the free-throw line, trying to just close that deficit?

DAIN DAINJA: It was just refusing not to lose. I don't know, like I just didn't want to lose. I kept going. I tried to do everything I could to get the W.

Q. To both you guys, Coleman did not have the best game early on, but to make the winning play he did today, what does that say about him, and what do you think about it?

TY RODGERS: I think that shows who he is, you know. Like Coach said earlier, he didn't have the best first half, but he stayed with us, and we withstood it.

That's what our team is about, stepping up and helping our brothers. He was ready, you know. Coach sat him, and when he came back in, he was ready to go, and he won the game for us. He had that big rebound. He had a big defensive play on Battle, and that's what it's about. Older guys, very mature.

I think that speaks a lot about Coleman himself.

Q. You've had a couple games where you didn't get rebounds at the end of games, and you kind of did that

to them today, where you got the offensive rebounds and just the effort plays. I know you've been preaching that. How good was it to see that maybe come to fruition?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: That's yes and no. They got a couple of offensive put-backs that kept possessions alive, but it's nice to be on the other side of that. Again, Coleman, five offensive rebounds, I don't know the last time he had five in a game. That might go back to his freshman year.

But those were winning plays, and those are plays that you have to make this time of year. There's no doubt those were the decisive moments in this game.

For a senior to step up and do that says a lot, especially not on his best night. But Coleman wanted to keep playing here.

Q. You mentioned survive and advance. Not only that, but it's a game where you're down double digits midway through the second half. How do you use situations like that to prepare you for the finality of March?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: You always have to learn from them. Most importantly, you have to learn why you got there. The fight back is something -- you know, we haven't been down -- I think we've only been down double digits three times this year. One was to Valpo, maybe Tennessee. I don't remember who the other one was. We haven't been down -- and Purdue, at Purdue. So it hasn't happened with us a lot.

But I don't doubt this team's toughness and their grit, but I think we have to learn why we have those moments. We didn't play very well offensively. We've got to play better. I thought defensively we were pretty solid for most of the night.

Q. They made their two runs, one run the first half, one the second half. What was the huddle like in those situations? Were there some adjustments that you felt like you made where you could chip away at the lead?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Yeah. We gave them live ball turnovers in the one in the first. We turned the ball over. We turned down shots. I've said this, we're turning down too many threes. I want us to take more threes. I want Coleman Hawkins to shoot threes. I want Marcus to shoot threes. I want Quincy to shoot threes. I want Justin Harmon to shoot threes. And we're turning them down.

Instead, we had live ball turnovers. Then the start of the

second half was just absolutely just flat. Ty got a big tip-in, and I got emotional in a timeout and tried to rally them, I mean, challenge them. Let's compete. Let's have a little fire. With a little, moderate success. I don't think it was over the top.

But we found a way today, and I'm proud of our guys for that.

Q. Coach, we got to see Dra Gibbs-Lawhorn give some great minutes in the game. What did you see that made you want to put him back in the rotation, and what did you see from his performance today --

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Well, he's been guarding. I thought, especially when they had Bonner in the game, I thought he was a guy that could really pressure the ball, disrupt their flow a little bit. I thought they were comfortable. They take Bruce off the ball some.

But, again, I've got a lot of confidence in Dravyn. He works hard every day. He's one of the hardest working guys on our team, if not the hardest working. When it's time to go, I know he's going to be ready to go.

Q. It's a bit off topic. Sorry, there's no good time to ask, I guess. It's about Chris Holtmann going to DePaul, what you think of him, what you think that he can do in Chicago. You know the city obviously, and you know him.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Well, he's very familiar with the league, having already been in it. So he knows how good that league is. He'll be a better coach going into that league now because he's been in this league. He has great success in this league.

I think Chris is one of the great, great coaches in the country. I think he'll find a way to help build that program and make it one of the top contenders. I'm a huge Chris Holtmann fan and always have been. I think he works really, really hard, and I think he's a helluva ball coach.

Q. You see the emotion when we bring up Dain's hometown being ten miles from here. What does that mean to you to see him kind of do this in front of a place that he's from?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: It's awesome. It's what this thing is all about. Marcus had a game earlier in the year when he was in Madison, back in his home state, and Dain right here.

Dain says it best. Dain's one of the nicest young people I could ever ask for. He's always got a smile on his face.

He's always funny. He's always laughing. He is relentless in his work ethic.

So when he's called upon to help us win, he's going to do that. He was fabulous today. So I'm really happy for him.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports