

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 15, 2024

Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

Target Center

Indiana Hoosiers

Mike Woodson

Xavier Johnson

Mackenzie Mgbako

Postgame Press Conference

Nebraska - 93, Indiana - 66

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Indiana University. Head coach Mike Woodson, along with Xavier Johnson and Mackenzie Mgbako.

MIKE WOODSON: I'll keep it brief. Just want to congratulate Fred and his team. They played extremely well. We just didn't have any answers tonight from a defensive standpoint because we were just not real good tonight. They were very good tonight offensively as well as defensively.

Q. Xavier, it was just 33-27 with three minutes to go in the first half, and they went on that crazy run. What happened there? And when it starts to snowball like that, what, if anything, could you guys have done to change that?

XAVIER JOHNSON: They just started making -- knocking down threes. We started losing defensively. Tominaga started getting hot, and it was call it a day from there.

Q. Xavier, it was a tough year for you. Obviously you weren't able to play very much. It seemed like through the Big Ten season the team was fighting something like that, whether it was your injury or somebody else's. How difficult was it to try to fight through and get to this point in the season? How much of a challenge was it?

XAVIER JOHNSON: I wouldn't say it was difficult getting to this point. I would say it was difficult just getting back into the rhythm of the game. I've been knocked out of rhythm so many times this year. I'm a rhythm type of player, and I've got a long way to get to my next



destination, to get everything back.

I've got time, and I'm going to put in the work to get to where I need to get to.

Q. Mackenzie, just as much as you can in the immediate aftermath of a loss, just how do you evaluate your journey this season, the improvements you've made maybe at both ends of the floor, the way your role has changed and grown? Basically your journey from November until now.

MACKENZIE MGBAKO: It was just keeping my head down, playing defense, and locking in on what Coach really had to say on offense and defense and being susceptible to the changes being made while the game was going on and just being a player of the game.

Q. Mackenzie, you guys have been playing really well through this last little stretch here, last five-game winning streak and stuff. Did this outcome today kind of come as a surprise to you?

MACKENZIE MGBAKO: Yes. I had all hopes we were going to win this game. It hurts that we lost.

Q. Mike, as far as the season is concerned, when you have -- I know you haven't had much chance to think about it, but when you look back on what you didn't have and what you're hoping to have next year, what assessment do you give to that and what you find in recruiting?

MIKE WOODSON: Again, it's too early right now to even entertain that question. The bottom line is we've got to get better. From a talent standpoint, this summer will be spent watching a lot of film on players because we're going to lose some players, I'm sure, and we're going to have to build around the core guys that are coming back.

We've just got a lot of work to do this summer to get better. I don't want to sit here this time next year and not be playing in the tournament.

Q. They did a lot of fronting on the bigs tonight, and it



was difficult for you guys to get anything going inside with your guys, which is kind of an important part of this season. What was the difficulty mostly there in trying to get anything going offensively with the bigs?

MIKE WOODSON: Again, I just -- I don't think we executed. We did a poor job in executing offensively. I mean, Malik and Ware have seen double teams all year from the back side, from the top side, from what we call the soft spot up top to the ball. They've been double-teaming all ways you can double-team, but they didn't read well tonight.

They didn't read the back side, and we were forcing things early to the point where we just didn't make the right play.

I thought our intentions were great when we came out because it was back and forth, but when it got to 33 to 26, 27, we dropped the rope, and they went in big at halftime and we just never recovered.

Q. Mike, the inside-outside offensive philosophy, what more from this year's group do you feel like you needed to make that work?

MIKE WOODSON: Again, for the most part, it did work. We didn't make enough shots. I thought coming down the homestretch these last five games, we shot the three ball extremely well, but early on and midway, we just -- we struggled to shoot the three ball. And then we struggled to make free throws.

We kind of put it all together the last five games prior to coming into this game, and we pretty much looked like a team. We made threes. We made our free throws. The ball was moving, and we got a lot of assists. So a lot of good things was happening in that five-game stretch.

But we met a team tonight that was really good and well coached, and we had nothing for them.

Q. Mike, I know you don't want to think too big picture right now, but the portal has always been, since you've come into the job, a consideration. How have your conversations maybe in the postseason through the immediate aftermath of the season evolved with your guys? When you sit down to talk to them about the season that was, what's coming next, where they are looking forward, where you are looking forward, how has that process evolved for you over the last three years?

MIKE WOODSON: Again, we've been -- we always meet every day, guys. We spend a lot of time, the coaches and I, together, and we talk about the what-ifs because you just

don't know based on the new system and the portal, you know, who's going to be on your team, who's not. Who are we going to entertain once the portal opens up?

So I mean, it's going to come very quickly, and we've got to be in position to do our homework and our due diligence on these players based on who we might want to come in to fill a spot to help us move forward next season.

Q. Mike, obviously your relationship with Xavier Johnson has been one that you've talked a lot about. He's been with you for three years now. He played probably the last of his college career tonight. When you reflect upon his career and kind of your relationship as a whole, what do you remember fondly about him?

MIKE WOODSON: Well, we had a good run. I look at the last two years with him, and even last year, him not playing as much for us, he's just always been there in spirit, and he's worked his butt, every time he got hurt, to get back out on the floor to compete. He's a competitor.

I just feel for him because he just wasn't able to fulfill his dream in terms of really completing his college career as a basketball player because he was hurt so much.

But life goes on. He's got to now think about his next journey in his life, and I just hope I'm a part of that. If he needs anything, I'm going to be there for him to help him navigate whatever direction he decides to go because that's just who I am as a coach. I need to be there for him because he was there for me when he was on the floor.

Q. Mike, you've talked through the course of this year about some things that have disappointed you about this season, but a dozen double-digit losses and many that were 20 points or more. Some of those blowout losses like that, is that something that might be the most frustrating part of this season for you, just not being competitive in some of these big games?

MIKE WOODSON: Every loss is frustrating because you go in the game with the game plan and you try to get your team to play at a high level. I know when they do, we're a pretty good basketball team, and we're very competitive. Tonight they were a step ahead of everything that we wanted to do, and you've got to give them credit. We've just got a lot of work to do this summer to get back and get our team back on top.

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