

# Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 16, 2024  
Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA  
Target Center

## Wisconsin Badgers

**Greg Gard**

**Max Klesmit**

**Chucky Hepburn**

Postgame Press Conference

Wisconsin - 76, Purdue - 75

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by the University of Wisconsin, head coach Greg Gard, Chucky Hepburn, and Max Klesmit.

GREG GARD: Obviously a terrific game, a terrific win for our team against a terrific Purdue team. I just can't say enough about these two guys to my right and also the other guys in the locker room, just the determination, the depth that we had to play with because of fouls, how guys stepped up and helped each other out, the execution on the timeouts.

At the end, the defensive play Chucky made there at the end to get a charge. I can go down the list. Just a terrific March game.

Excited to watch these guys mature and grow and get better as the season's going on, and they're playing their best basketball right now. This is where you want to be. Excited to -- we'll enjoy this one for a couple hours and then get ready for tomorrow's championship game.

**Q. Chucky and then Max, if you guys could take us through the last sequence, Chucky, you drawing the charge, and Max, what you were hoping to get before you took that shot up.**

CHUCKY HEPBURN: I was just trying to force a turnover. I knew Braden Smith had gotten into me a little bit. So I was able to sell the charge and he definitely extended, and they called it.

MAX KLESMIT: Really just trying to get something at the front of the rim. Chucky drove it into the lane and draws a



lot of attention. So his ability to just see the floor, kick it out to me, and then continue to try to put pressure on the rim.

Just got a good look at the end, and it went in.

**Q. When you're in a game like that and the fouls aren't going your way, you're not getting a lot of whistles and it feels like every other possession, they're getting the whistles, how do you keep your head and just stay strong in the game mentally?**

CHUCKY HEPBURN: Move on to the next play. That's how you have the mentality to win in March. You can't keep crying about the one play that's in the past. You've got to move on. That's how you're going to win in March.

**Q. You guys had some struggles in February kind of closing out games. Now you've had that happen on the good side here the last few. What was your confidence level like trying to get through that, and where do you guys stand now just where your confidence level is in closing out games?**

MAX KLESMIT: Yeah, I think our confidence is coming from the chemistry we've all built, this bond we've built in the locker room. It's carrying it outside onto the floor now. Our ability to learn during that stretch in late February, early March, and not dwell on it or look at it as a burden.

So just coming into work every day. Everybody is super positive, ready to go, ready to learn. I think that's just starting to show now on the floor.

There's not a better group of guys I'd want to be around. I've never really been this far in March in my career. So I just want to keep playing with the dudes we've got in this locker room. It's been a lot of fun.

**Q. Chucky, you obviously put in a lot of work to your finishing over the off-season. Can you describe that sort of final sequence at the end of regulation and I guess sort of the work that went into being able to make shots like that.**

CHUCKY HEPBURN: I appreciate the coaching staff for



helping me get my rhythm back. During the season I struggled a lot. Around like early February start, that's when they really stepped in, and I was able to get my touch back, able to find my feel for the game again.

Just the work I kept doing, you know, they helped me with that. So I give credit to them, and I also give credit to myself because I worked for this. I do deserve this spot.

**Q. Also for Chucky, on that last basket in regulation, can you walk us through that? Was that the first option? Was the three the first option and you saw that you needed to drive it? Just walk us through that.**

CHUCKY HEPBURN: The three was the first option, but I had seen that Braden was a little too close to me. So I knew I had the angle on him, and I was able to get to the rim. I knew they didn't want to foul. So he just stepped out of the way, and I was able to convert.

**Q. For either one of you guys, you lost two really tight ones to Purdue during the regular season. How good does it feel to get the win this time around?**

MAX KLESMIT: It feels good to end up on the other side of this one, but like I said before, just our ability to learn from it, take the experience that we've had in the regular season, and apply it during games, it's been really fun just to know that we have in that in our back pocket, our ability to learn on the fly, pick different things up in the scout in preparation, and things like that.

It's been fun just to see our growth kind of throughout the whole season and our maturity kind of come out as we've kept playing.

**Q. You talk about this bond you've built and how it's so much fun to play with this team. Can you just talk about how you've built such a strong bond with this team in particular.**

MAX KLESMIT: Like you're going to have ups and downs in the season, and it's going to be what do you do to make up for that? How are you going to handle yourself when things go bad, and how are you going to handle yourself when things go well?

All 18 dudes in the locker room are even keeled. Nobody gets too high or too low on themselves. Everyone knows we've got trust in one another. And I think that just shows on the floor. The best player we've got on our team, his ability to give the ball up and just trust someone else in the late game, speaks volume. It screams "team," not just "me." So having that and building off of that, it's going to be good for us.

**Q. Max, you said yesterday about seeing the shot go through the rim, I guess seeing that earlier in the game, how much does that help in sort of that last shot of the game?**

MAX KLESMIT: Yeah, it helps to see the first couple go in for sure, get your confidence going early. Like I said, just staying aggressive, keeping the confidence that you have. I know that this coaching staff and the players, my teammates have in me, there's nothing to really fear or be scared about going into a game. You've got the utmost confidence and you've got everybody's trust.

**Q. The play that you did dial up for Chucky on the inbound, was that something you've run before?**

GREG GARD: Not in seven years, but we've done it before, yeah. You know where, right, and who, yeah. Just haven't been in that position.

**Q. You've been so consistent with us the last couple weeks, saying this team hasn't flinched, they don't flinch. You lose a couple guys fouling out, clearly a couple guys banged up. How does a performance like this just exemplify that in this team?**

GREG GARD: I think it speaks volumes for our depth, and I've said that all year that I think our ace in our pocket is our depth. Obviously we've got different guys different nights. Yesterday was A.J., today Chucky makes big plays. The day before it was John Blackwell.

We're not specifically one or two people dependent in terms of production, and when you have guys either go down or banged up or we have three guys foul out, guys like Carter Gilmore that haven't played a lot here recently in the last three weeks come in, and their minds are in the right place. That allows them to perform.

If you're sulking and feeling sorry for yourself and, why don't I have my minutes? If you have mine, me, and I in your vocabulary and your thought process, you're not going to be ready for that position when Steve fouled out.

But Gilly has doing a good job of being about the team. He always has. That allows him to come in and perform when we needed him to.

**Q. Way back in the beginning of the season, after that Marquette win, you talked about belief, just the team believing to win in games like this. Did the team need to refine that going against opponents like this, trying to string together wins?**

GREG GARD: You're always trying to instill belief in them because they get so many negative shots from the outside world, that you constantly are countering that. We've talked all year, actually since September, believe, earn, and finish. You have to see it first. You have to dream about it. This group has big goals. I've said before, the only one that's gotten away from them so far is the regular season.

Then you've got to go do the work. You've got to earn it, and you've got to finish it.

I think this group has always had strong belief in themselves, but they're 18 to 22 years old that are going through a lot of things sometimes, some adversity for the first time. Sometimes you've got to prop them up. But at the same time, you hold them accountable and push them through and help them fight through it.

Then you get to this point in time, and hopefully that maturity and those experiences start to pay off.

**Q. Greg, in the past handful of years, you guys have probably had more success against Purdue than anyone. You kind of saw that right from the get-go today. You guys don't back down from them and take it to them as much as you can. Can you talk about the mentality of that and playing that team and just sort of staying there every minute?**

GREG GARD: I don't know if it's a mentality. We try not to back down from anyone. I have such great respect for Matt. I think our programs are very similar in the fabric of them and what we believe in and how we go about things. We do things the right way. I think Matt does things the right way, in terms of how he builds his program, how he recruits. He's a great representation for our league nationally as a coach.

You trace that back to Coach Keady, Coach Bennett, Coach Ryan. Those two programs are built on lunch pail, hardhat mentalities. It's always an honor to compete against them because he's a terrific coach that has really good players, and they make you coach better and make our players better because the bar is set really high.

**Q. It seems like there's been a tale of two teams throughout the season. During that rough stretch you had in late January, early February, you talked about sloppiness, turnovers. What's the biggest difference between when you're on and when you're struggling?**

GREG GARD: The obvious one is I have all my guys. We're healthy and able to use a complete rotation. But I think every team goes through -- most part, maybe UConn

hasn't gone through one, Purdue hasn't gone through one, maybe Houston hasn't. Everybody else in the country has gone through some sort of adversity. Maybe it's a three-game streak. Maybe it's a five-game streak. Maybe they had it in December. Maybe they had it in January. You're going to go through it. There's so much parity in college basketball.

When you play tough non-conference schedules like we do, and Matt does as well, you put your neck out there, and you're going to risk this. Then we get in our league, and we know each other so well, and there's great coaches and great players in our league, that you're going to take some bumps.

You have to not put your head down, as these guys said, not feel sorry for yourself. Don't let the valleys get too low and don't get the peaks get too high and keep pushing forward knowing there will be light at the end of the tunnel if you do hit a rough patch.

**Q. How have you seen Max work through the shooting struggles that he's been going through over the last month plus?**

GREG GARD: I think you focus on other parts of your game. There's a lot of ways you can help a team be successful without necessarily shooting at a high clip. For him, defensively he's anchored that perimeter spot pretty well and done a good job with that. His leadership, he's done a really good job with that. He's really got a voice in that locker room.

His toughness, obviously, and that's combined with his voice and his leadership. So he put time in. He's in the gym. He's working. It's a tool and a skill you can't let sit idle and collect dust. Whether you're cooking, shooting the ball, or struggling, you still have to put in the work, and he's done that, as has Chucky. I think you see guys that have hit their way out of it, so to speak.

If you're a golfer and you're shanking the ball, you don't get better by not going to the range or leaving your clubs in your garage. You've got to go work at it. These guys work at it.

**Q. Greg, Tyler did not hit a lot of shots today, but it's clear he wasn't fully healthy. What was he able to give you both in terms of tangible on the court, but also maybe sending a message to his teammates like, this is important. I'm not healthy, but I'm staying out here?**

GREG GARD: It was kind of indecisive if he was going to go or not. He was and then he wasn't and then he was. But I think for him too he got two quick fouls, so he sat.

Yeah, it just shows the toughness of him and the leadership that he was going to battle out there and use all five fouls and continue to scrap even though he was maybe out of sync because of the fouls and he's a little banged up. But now we've got time to continue to freshen him back up.

He didn't play a lot today, so that was a blessing in disguise too.

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