

# Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

**Minnesota Golden Gophers**

**Ben Johnson**

**Parker Fox**

**Dawson Garcia**

Postgame Press Conference



**Q. You're Minnesota guys. You watched this program for a long time. Beyond this season, what are the expectations that you felt like when you first got here that you hope continue to be in the goals for this program?**

DAWSON GARCIA: I care a lot about this program and everybody in it and the state. Just because I may not be able to have a jersey anymore doesn't mean that -- I'm going to still be representing.

PARKER FOX: I think it's a no-brainer for me to come here and to come home, to be around my family, to be around a program that I've supported my whole life, and to put trust in this guy. I can't thank him enough for that, just allowing me to kind of live out my dreams. It will be something that I hold close to my heart for the rest of my life.

Knowing that just because -- like Dawson said, just because I can't wear the jersey again doesn't mean I'm not going to be at every game and be the biggest fan I can be, hopefully in the media space as well.

Just grateful for him and grateful for my teammates and everybody that has kind of led me to that and knowing that Minnesota is still going to be on my chest for a long time.

**Q. Tough night shooting the ball. Garcia did everything you could have asked of him. He's one of the elite players in this league. Talk a little bit about how you looked at your team and their shooting tonight. I thought he was a little out of rhythm all night long.**

BEN JOHNSON: I'd agree. It's kind of ironic we were really good from the line, which we haven't been for a lot of the year.

We've just never kind of been able to in a game either have multiple guys play really well that we need to or be able to shoot it well from the floor and shoot it well from the line. It's kind of been like one or the other, and we try to survive that way. It's just so tough to do that in this league.

Northwestern - 72, Minnesota - 64

BEN JOHNSON: Obviously give a lot of credit to Northwestern. Chris does a great job with their crew, and they've got a really good culture built and expectation of winning and the standard of winning.

When you make the NCAA Tournament, just the overall vibe that you can feel within that program is really strong. Credit to him. Credit to their guys.

I thought our guys battled in stretches really, really good and gave ourselves a chance in stretches and just couldn't do the things we needed to in the second half to keep it manageable. They did a good job closing it.

**Q. Both guys, just talk a little bit about the end of the season and what you were playing for. You got to the Big Ten tournament. That was your first goal. What the mindset was coming into this game.**

PARKER FOX: I think just proud of the way we kind of were resilient and pushed back after starting 0-6. I talked about it in the media a lot, we had a deep senior class and guys that wanted to keep playing, guys that really liked being around each other, liked playing for Coach Johnson. It kind of stinks the way that it finished out here.

I think at the end of the day we accomplished some good things this year. We had way higher goals, but just proud of the way the guys fought. Yeah, wish we had more hoops, that's for sure.

DAWSON GARCIA: Nobody expected us to be here. We expected to be here and do better. So I guess we fooled everybody. But disappointed ourselves.



Today I thought we had some pretty good looks, and they didn't fall. Sometimes because of that your offense gets stagnant. We had to go away from our game plan a little bit because we needed to get something downhill. We never got a rhythm and a flow.

Credit Northwestern. They're tough, they're physical, but I just thought our pace was never one where guys just felt comfortable. It's just -- it sucks to end that way. We've proven we can play better basketball offensively, and to have just a tough night where it didn't have a flow to it is just tough.

**Q. When you look where you're at in this program now, where do you see Minnesota at right now? I know it's a tough loss, but where do you see you going from this point forward?**

BEN JOHNSON: Hopefully there's a chance. If we can make something here postseason-wise to give these guys, especially the seniors, an opportunity to end on a better note, that's probably goal number one because I know they want to play.

The second piece is obviously we've got to attack the portal and be able to take a step. I like some of the guys that are going to return -- whether it's Ike, whether it's Frank, some other guys that have some options they've got to think about with a chance to come back.

We've got to do a better job in the portal of just identifying guys that are going to be able to just be really impactful and thankful to have the resources now to do it, because in this league, it's so competitive and so well coached and so tough. Those resources really, really help. So now to be able to hopefully hit the ground running here with those and just do a good job finding guys that continue to elevate and can play and compete on a really high level.

**Q. Last week we had the women in here, and one of the questions we asked him was Oregon, Washington, UCLA, USC. How do you feel about them coming into the Big Ten and the travel part that goes with it because everybody is going to have to travel. How did you guys see it in Minnesota?**

BEN JOHNSON: I can only talk from our standpoint. We only had to go out there one time, so I can imagine having to make the trip multiple times, it's a little bit of a grind.

But to have those programs, those brands in our conference, it just elevates everything. You add those four schools with the tradition on the men's side that they have, the grind is real. So it's going to keep everything that much

more competitive.

I know Washington probably didn't have the year that they wanted to, but Danny's going to get that thing going, and it's going to be rolling, and they're going to have the resources to do it. Again, it makes things that much more competitive.

The travel part, it is what it is. You probably would have to ask those guys because they do it more than we do. It is a thing. That's definitely real. But it's good to have them in this league to make this league as competitive and as good as it can be. They really elevate everybody's play.

**Q. Just talk about where you were a year ago. Completely different team almost, but at the same time, you probably felt like you were really close with that group that you had. Then with the portal it kind of fell apart a little bit, trying to put back the pieces as quickly as you did. Here we are now. I know it's been a year and it's a long road, but can you just talk about what that meant? Just talk about what that meant where you were that close last year and to kind of go through the ups and downs of this year.**

BEN JOHNSON: Yeah, welcome to the state of college basketball. Just with the age and era we're in, you don't want some of that stuff when you feel like you've got some good momentum. You've obviously got some young pieces to grow and develop that are really good, excited for the opportunity that Cam got, or it's pieces that you have that left. That part is tough.

We got to continue to just build and find ways to build within the portal. Again, Ike and Frank, two pieces that we know are coming back. A couple guys got to make some decisions on what they want to do. So you take those pieces and hope those guys can learn from this year and hope the minutes got them better and the development in the spring will get them better and the summer, and then just absolutely kill it in the portal.

Just understanding that in this culture everybody's on a one-year deal, and it can be tough, especially when you're talking about that momentum piece because if you lose it, you have to hit the home run in the portal to sustain.

Again, excited for that part because we know what it takes to win at this level. We've done it. But we know the pieces, we know the talent, you understand what it takes to really be at the top and put yourself in position position. That's kind of the fun challenge, I'm appreciative of the resources now to go out there and do that, and there's no doubt in my mind that that's what we'll be doing.



I think everybody in our program, there were parts of this year where you felt really excited and really proud, and you're so close. This was a unique, special group. Then the last couple games, they had the feeling, it's only a motivator. It's only a motivator that the standard of where we're going and what we're doing, we know exactly what needs to be done.

If you're a competitive person, that's what motivates you these next couple weeks to put together a product and a team that gives yourself a true chance.

**Q. Nick Martinelli obviously had another big night for Northwestern. What makes him so difficult to slow down?**

BEN JOHNSON: He's really, really hard to guard. That's probably obviously an understatement. He's just got a way to get open. So like you can take away their action, but he's so smart and has such a good feel and determination, he's going to find a way to get a catch. Then once he gets a catch, he's really good in triple threat. He's got a great one-on-one game. And he's just got that unique way where he could get his shot off.

So shots that are a really high degree difficulty for most guys that aren't going to make it, he just finds a way to get that little bit of an angle and get it on the rim and his touch is really good. So when it gets on the rim, I don't know how many times he's had a back rim finish that goes in or side rim that goes in, rim, backboard, rim. It's such a soft shot.

His size, you know if you play small, you'd better double because he's getting downhill and he's getting to the paint. If you play big, you'd better hope your bigs are able to move their feet because of his first step. And they just put him in really good positions.

He does a good job with his will to just almost will the ball to go in sometimes. He's relentless with his pursuit. As an offensive rebounder, keeps second-chance points alive. I just have a ton of respect for him.

I saw him a little bit in high school, so like from where he's at now to where he was then, all credit goes to him and their staff. The kid's a made man and one of the toughest covers I've probably had in coaching, period, at like any level just because of all the different ways he can beat you.

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