

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 14, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Maryland Terrapins

Kevin Willard

Rodney Rice

Jordan Geronimo

Postgame Press Conference

Maryland - 88, Illinois - 65

THE MODERATOR: We will take an opening statement from Coach Willard.

KEVIN WILLARD: Really happy with the way we came out and played defensively, knowing they had played Iowa and it was almost like a good matchup for us because we're so much different than Iowa.

But guys came out focused and good win.

Q. Rod, can you kind of take us through what it felt like being in the zone you're in tonight, and then at what point in the game did you realize it might be a special night for you? Was it after your first 3 went through or after the four-point play or somewhere in between?

RODNEY RICE: Probably the first 3. It just felt good leaving my hand, and that's what the rest of them felt like. So it was definitely a good night, yeah.

Q. Jordan, your teammates all season long have spoken about how much of a presence you play whether or not it shows up on the score sheet, what you do defensively, what you do energy. How satisfying was it to put your season high up in a game this big at this time in March?

JORDAN GERONIMO: Feels great to be able to contribute and to be able to help my team win. I trust my teammates to find me, and that's what they did. They trust me with the ball, and I was able to put it in the rim. So shout out to them too.



Q. Jordan, welcome back to Indiana. It has to feel pretty good to be sitting up on that stage after a nice win like this after you transferred into Maryland. Talk a little bit about your journey back into Maryland and how it feels tonight.

JORDAN GERONIMO: It feels good. Like you said, when I was at Indiana, I was able to play -- go far and play March Madness. Coming back in with this new team, it feels great to be able to advance with this team and show you guys what we got. So it feels good.

Q. Rod, just how well did you guys take care of the basketball? Three turnovers is kind of a ridiculous number. You had zero in the first half. How much of a focus was ball security?

RODNEY RICE: That might have been our best of the season, but that's a great job by us. We got to do that moving forward too.

Q. Rodney, can you sort of take me through that second four-point play in the second half there coming off the ground. What happened?

RODNEY RICE: Coach drew up a good play. Came around the screen --

KEVIN WILLARD: You guys don't say that very often.

RODNEY RICE: The ball found me, and I looked at the rim, and it was going up. It felt good coming off my hands, and I was able to hit the shot.

Q. Rodney, have you ever had a game or a moment like that where you're just not missing. Shucks, even going back to high school or grammar school or anything like that, have you had a moment like that for yourself?

RODNEY RICE: Yeah, our second game of the season, probably that game.

Q. Rodney, earlier this week you talked about the All Conference awards and how it was kind of crazy that



you got left off of that. I don't want to say that you tipped your hand, but did some of that motivate you to do what you did tonight?

RODNEY RICE: For sure. I'm glad I got the motivation now. I'm going to just continue to play and let my game do the talking.

Q. Jordan, we kind of talked about after the Northwestern game about the long break you have and how the last couple times you haven't done well. What did you do this week differently to make sure that wasn't going to happen again?

JORDAN GERONIMO: We just focused in practice. Coach Willard does a great job making sure that we stay sharp in practice, and knowing that we haven't performed well after long breaks, we were conscious about that, and we was able to lock in and do what we have to do to get this W today.

Q. After a slow start by both teams, and there was a couple free throws by Illinois, it was a 6-4 ballgame. Boy, things just seemed like it took off for your ball club then. Rice hit four 3s. He also had a couple free throws. Reese had a single field goal in there. Bear with me here. And Derik Queen, he just ripped the ball out of the hands of the Illini on a rebound and put it back. Then Geronimo with an offensive rebound.

KEVIN WILLARD: Are we going to go through the whole box score? I'm from New York. There's got to be a question.

Q. I'm done. Then Geronimo also with a 3 and capped off a 23-6 run and a 19-point lead. It seems like you guys never looked back after that. Sorry for the length of it.

KEVIN WILLARD: That was a great job describing the game. I got nothing for you. That was great.

Q. You're one of the top defensive units in the country. Just to kind of cut to the chase, what went into this performance to hold them to 36 percent shooting from the field?

KEVIN WILLARD: I think we're sixth in the country in defense. We've been really good defensively since probably the Marquette game early. The Marquette game kind of exposed us a little bit of what we had to fix.

We've been really, really consistent defensively. These guys listen to our schemes. They understand our schemes. And our bench, they don't get enough credit.

Obviously The Crab Five is great, and I know I have five guys that shoot it in the starting five, but our bench guys give us great energy on the defensive end. So we don't have a let down when we go to the bench.

A lot of teams they go to the bench, they have a letdown. We never have a letdown. Because defensively our numbers actually get better when the bench goes in the game.

Q. What was practice like this week to make sure the same thing wasn't going to happen after the break?

KEVIN WILLARD: We took off -- I think Senior Night was Saturday. We took off Sunday, and then that's the only day we took off. We got right back into it Monday, had two good days of practice Tuesday and Wednesday. Then technically yesterday was, in my eyes, an off day. In their eyes, not.

Again, we didn't play good coming out of going out West, but that was a little bit -- it was just bad scheduling by me, to be perfectly honest with you. We had four days off for Christmas, and I threw a game in there probably way too early, and just we didn't have enough practice time.

We played pretty good at coming out at Ohio State was our last bye, and we just missed six free throws. If we make our free throws, we win that game.

These guys have understood that to stay sharp we've got to practice.

Q. Illinois has blown out a lot of teams this year. You guys have flipped the script and blown them out twice. What do you like about that matchup that's led to that success?

KEVIN WILLARD: The first game was a little different because they didn't have Ivistic. They are a talented team, and they're really good, but they're also young. So I kind of like the fact that we can post-up, we can go at them and be a little bit more physical. I think they've struggled against teams that have been physical with them just because they're young.

Last night they score 100 and something points with Iowa, but the ball never touched the post. It was going to be different tonight. So we came out, and I think we've been very physical with them both times we've played them.

Q. Hey Kevin, Jordan and Tafara's performance might get overshadowed with such a big number on the scoreboard, but for them how important is it for them this time of year to eat this many minutes and to put

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

points up as well when they haven't been doing that recently?

KEVIN WILLARD: Jordan has been great. Jordan has been as good as anybody, especially energy-wise. For me, getting Tafara back is huge because he gives us another level coming off the bench, and he just -- he got sick, and he missed 12 straight days with the flu, lost 19 pounds. So he's now just getting back to where he was.

He was playing really good. I mean, he was playing at a high level for us, and he was getting 22 minutes a game. Then he got sick. To get both those guys back is great because they each give us something a little different.

Q. How did the team's performance align with your pregame strategy, and were there any adjustments made during the game?

KEVIN WILLARD: Any time you're up 26 at halftime, you must have done something right. I thought we came out very focused, really understood what we wanted to do with the game plan. Again, the second time you play someone, you have a better feel for them.

Yeah, we didn't really do anything out of halftime. We're up 26, so I just told them not to mess it up. And they didn't, so I think they listened both times.

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