

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 14, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Illinois Fighting Illini

Brad Underwood

Kasparas Jakucionis

Kylan Boswell

Postgame Press Conference



Q. KJ, Kylan, what did you learn? Coach Underwood said you have to learn something from this. What did each of you learn from this?

KASPARAS JAKUCIONIS: Definitely the importance of every detail in the game because it's one game, you win or you go home. It will be the same in the tournament.

We just have to learn that every detail matters, every little thing, every little effort matters in the game, and we have to execute for that.

KYLAN BOSWELL: For me, I just feel like hopefully next time we step on the court we just pick up all of our energy as a team. It was definitely flat. It wasn't going our way in the beginning, and you just kind of could tell the situation wasn't rolling.

Yeah, I've won a conference tournament, then I got sent home early my sophomore year, so I know what it takes. For us, we've just got to pick up our energy for sure.

Q. Kylan or KJ, I don't know if you agree with this, but it looked like in the first half you guys maybe weren't getting the shots you wanted offensively. Kind of what went into that and maybe feeling a little bit rattled on the offensive end?

KYLAN BOSWELL: Yeah, they definitely were really aggressive. For us, that's something we need to amp up on our side.

We made some careless mistakes, some early turnovers. Definitely we just didn't make the right decisions as we normally do. All we can do right now is just watch the film on that, get back in the lab together, and just fix it.

KASPARAS JAKUCIONIS: Yeah, I would agree we turned the ball over, and we didn't shoot the shots we wanted, we didn't create the shots we wanted, but the defensive side was even worse. So that's where we have to focus on.

Q. Guys, the last loss you guys had was against Duke four weeks ago almost. What changed after that game

Maryland - 88, Illinois - 65

THE MODERATOR: We've been joined by the Illini. Coach Underwood, we'll take an opening statement from you.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: My hat's off to Maryland. Pretty good. They're pretty good. Whipped our butt in every facet.

I think we have a lot we can learn from a team like them. But it was probably my fault for not doing a good enough job, one, getting these guys mentally -- what's the right word -- dialed into understanding what this was going to be. It wasn't going to be Iowa. Free and easy, quick turn.

Yeah, we let Rodney Rice cook us in the first half, very disappointing. I was really disappointed in our defense on the perimeter. I was good with letting Reese and Queen try to score 2s because it's not what makes them great. What makes them great is when they make 3s.

Our perimeter defense, we were very flat, very lethargic, not much energy, and that's on me. Getting these guys ready to play, understanding the urgency -- when you lose you go home. Next time we get to do this, we lose, we go home.

Hopefully we learned a lot from Maryland today. The energy, they're the Number 1 defense in the country analytically since January. Us scoring 110 or whatever we scored yesterday probably gave them a little more hype to come out and kick our butt, and they did.

By the way, they're good enough to win it. They're good. They're really good.



that you feel that you can maybe take into next week with the tournament?

KASPARAS JAKUCIONIS: I think our effort and energy after Duke went up. We were executing on defense a lot more. Our practices were going better and better. I hope and I think and I believe that, after this loss, we will only get better, and we will execute in practice, especially on the defensive end.

We'll all have more energy, and we'll be more hungry to win.

Q. Kylan, how do you feel about your team heading into the NCAA Tournament? Obviously you guys don't have a lot of experience outside of you and Tre and Dra. How do you feel about this?

KYLAN BOSWELL: I feel confident as always. I'll never not say that. Sometimes it's good though to get your butt handed to you right before you walk into March. I think Coach said that Iowa was kind of a false reality. Every team is going to be trying to play because they're not trying to go home, really aggressive, talking a lot.

Maryland for sure today, he was saying it earlier before the game, it was a shock to our central nervous system. You just can't come out there not ready to hoop at any point.

It's good for us to watch this film, get a couple days rest, get back on our feet, and just go in with the right mentality.

Q. Kylan, you've been around the block. Does it concern you that there have now been two games pretty late in the season, high profile opponents and stages and all that, where you guys just didn't have the energy, the readiness that we're talking about here?

KYLAN BOSWELL: No, I mean basketball is a game of opportunities. It happens. We've had two bad losses, but at the same time, we beat Michigan and Purdue. People were thinking the same stuff.

For us, it's nothing to worry about. Like I said, we've got to watch the film, and then when we find out where we're going, we've just got to know it's win or go home, and we've got to have the right mentality when we go into March.

Q. Brad, obviously this team's going up-and-down. There's been a lot of discrepancy. You've had big wins, a lot of big losses, not as many in between games. Can you explain that for your team?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Again, I thought today was -- we're

young. We haven't been here. To know and to see our energy yesterday compared to today, I just told our staff that's on me. We've got to do a better job of making sure these guys understand.

We opened the game with two turnovers. We just threw the ball to them. They do a great job of playing with their hands in the pocket. We told them, all your pocket passes, you can't throw. Tommy throws one low right after that.

Mentally getting dialed in, that shows more on the defensive side. When we get a little bit stunted or hit early -- we handle it late, but when we get it early, we haven't been able to respond to that very well.

Today's the first time in a bit that we've gotten off to a tough start. We just didn't handle it very well. Maybe it's me. Maybe I've got to do something different, I've got to sub, I don't know. But our energy today was awful. Awful.

Q. As you mentioned, you pride the defense on not allowing 3-point opportunities. The last two nights a couple guys have got off. Is that two guys getting hot, or something that needs to be cleaned up?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I thought Payton's looks last night, for the most part, other than one or two in transition, were really hard. He made some hard shots. The job we did today was awful. We let Rice step into four in the first half that you could have made. There was no bite. There was no sting.

That's where I'm really disappointed. We trailed everything. We were really late, nonaggressive. And when you're nonaggressive in basketball and the ball doesn't go in for you, the other team gets confidence, and then you get these opportunities where that rim looks like a 55-gallon drum.

Q. You know your team better than anybody, but based on where your head was at last night or this morning when you got up, what were you expecting? Were you surprised, and are you surprised now by the way it went?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Yeah, I'm disappointed. I don't want to say -- nothing in basketball surprises me after 38 years of doing this. There's so many things that are variables.

I was disappointed we didn't fight on the defensive end, and that's my job to get them ready to fight. I didn't have them fight. I didn't have them ready to go to battle today.

We can't do that anymore. This team's young. I need to

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

help them in those areas. It was back-to-back. We were ready yesterday. I think any time you're playing for a trophy or a championship, I assumed too much that maybe we would just be ready to go.

Boy, our energy was really off, and we've got to get that corrected. That's on us.

Q. With 2:40 left in the game, you called timeout. Maybe I'm reading into something, but what's the message to the team in that moment? I know you guys finished the game on an 8-0 run.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Maybe I need to burn them all -- no. Really I wanted to run the play. We had a last second play that we put in that we haven't ran all year, and I wanted to make sure that Morez, being in the game, knew it. Will scored on it. That was a great timeout. I wish I could have had 42 of them.

Yeah, the game was over, but it was more about wanting to run that play and literally talk through next week. We didn't talk about ending the game in any other way. We talked about it's a loss, let's move on, what this thing looks like for the future.

Q. A couple Big Ten coaches have been fired. Do you have any thoughts or reflections on -- especially with Fran, but you've competed against these guys for a while and know them well.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I know Fran much better than I do Ben, but I have so much respect for the job that Ben did. His teams are always well-coached, disciplined, played hard.

I don't know what goes into all those decisions internally. I know as a basketball coach that you hate to see your counterparts -- it's like I saw Fran in the hallway last night, and you could tell he was emotional with Payton. You've got 15 years in a place at an institution, and nothing's easy.

For me personally with Fran, you go back, and you start thinking of the battles that we've had, and they've been epic. There's been some incredible battles competing for championships. You always remember those.

The other side of that for me is I know Fran personally. I know his family very well. I know how good a person he is and what a great human being. You never want ill things to happen.

I texted Ben the next morning. Just a tremendous amount of respect for those two guys. In Fran's case he's had an unbelievable run, unbelievable career, and I'm sure Ben

will get another opportunity.

Q. Obviously losses like this hurt and not having the chance to win the Big Ten Championship hurts. But as you said throughout tonight, you've got a couple more days of rest and preparation to go into really what matters is March Madness, like you said in that last timeout. After tonight in the next couple of days you get, what's your main message going to be to the team so you guys can try to avoid this come next week?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: The great opportunity is last year, when we won it last year, we took Monday off and had to travel Tuesday. There was no prep time. We were fortunate that it's such a quick turn. Now we'll get to dissect this with film. We'll have some teaching points. We'll get rested. We'll actually have practice times to go correct some things that we've got to get right and get focused.

It was a good learning tool for me today. Now we get one day prep instead of four days in a row or what could have been four days in a row.

We'll be fine. This is a good basketball team. We've proven that here in the last couple weeks. It wasn't our day today. Give Maryland all the props because they deserve them all. We're going to show up next Thursday or Friday against whoever we have to play, and we're going to compete awfully hard.

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