

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Sunday, March 16, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Wisconsin Badgers

Greg Gard

John Tonje

Max Klesmit

John Blackwell

Postgame Press Conference

Michigan - 59, Wisconsin - 53

GREG GARD: This one stings, but as I told the team, I couldn't ask for any more in terms of what they've given us and how they played today other than we didn't make shots. I mean, we battled like crazy.

You're in a one-possession game or a tie game with under a minute to go, and that's sometimes how it happens. We didn't make shots when we needed to. Credit goes to Michigan for making one more or two more.

Like I said, this group has battled like crazy all year. Today was no different. We put ourselves in a good position, as hard as today is, that we're going to play next week.

Q. For all three of you guys, four games in four days, Max and John Blackwell, you guys have been through that before, but do you feel like fatigue potentially played a factor in that today. And how tough is it to do what you guys did today, play four games in four days and have a game like this where it's as physical as it was?

JOHN BLACKWELL: I think we're well conditioned. I don't think the fatigue was an issue. I think we played our hearts out. I think we gave it everything we've got, just came up short.

MAX KLESMIT: I thought we played -- yeah, I don't think our conditioning had anything to do with it. Just not enough shots went in.

JOHN TONJE: I'm not looking for any excuses. Just kind



of like they said, shots didn't fall today.

Q. John Tonje, when the shots aren't falling, it looked like you and your teammates sort of adjusted and went to more attacking the basket in the second half. Can you talk about that, and how successful do you think that was in terms of keeping the offense somewhat productive?

JOHN TONJE: We just tried to be aggressive and switch it up a little bit when shots weren't falling, but it just wasn't enough to keep us afloat.

Q. Both Johns and Max, the first half of that game, it felt like you guys and Michigan were feeling out each other, seeing where you guys' weakness were. Talk a little bit about both your defense on Michigan and Michigan's defense on you guys one by one.

MAX KLESMIT: I thought we did a really good job defensively. I thought our 4s and 5s battled really hard all game, tried to make Wolf and Goldin's life as hard as they possibly could.

JOHN BLACKWELL: I thought we did a great job in the first half -- the whole game defensively, just a few mishaps late in the game.

We haven't played them since December, I don't think, so we're kind of a new team since then, and they're kind of a new team since then. We're just adjusting in the game flow.

Q. Max and John Blackwell, you guys kind of went through a similar path last year, a really strong Big Ten tournament and a close game in the championship. How do you guys -- what's kind of this next week going to look like to kind of make sure you guys go into the NCAA Tournament now strong and kind of avoid how last year ended?

JOHN BLACKWELL: I think, first of all, just taking care of our bodies, getting back to Madison and just taking care of our bodies, eating the right stuff and making sure we're ready to go, whatever day we play, either Thursday or

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Friday.

Q. Greg, tough nose-to-nose, foot-to-foot defensive battle. Talk about where you thought things went well and where you thought things were a little bit more difficult.

GREG GARD: I thought we had pretty good looks really the whole game, and knowing that both of us have really good defensive teams, we know, even though we've only played once, I think we know each other pretty well. It came down to -- I'll go through the tape, but I don't think I could have asked for better looks than the ones we got, even late on an out-of-bounds play. Blackwell got to the rim.

It was just one of those where we needed to draw a few more fouls and/or knock down some more shots from the perimeter when we had a chance. We had some wide open looks, one on the corner. Blackwell had one wide open up off the slot, up one.

If you're going to win a championship, you've got to make a play, and part of making a play is knocking down a shot in a tight ballgame.

Q. You mentioned a bit you guys -- in the last few games, you guys have been able to get to the free-throw line pretty good, and you've been able to hit a lot of free throws. What do you think was the difference today with you guys attacking the rim that maybe didn't result in as many trips to the free-throw line?

GREG GARD: I'll grade out the tape. I normally grade our play, but I grade how -- did we not draw contact? Did we not play through contact? Did they let us just play? That's one thing that you always try to get a feel for how it's getting called.

It was extremely physical. Bodies -- it's a physical game, and both teams were not backing off on either end, specifically in the paint. The fact that we got the ball in the paint, shot chart looked pretty good for the most part. You've got to finish some things at the rim, and we've got to do a better job, I guess, of drawing contact if we didn't get fouled when we went in there.

Q. I don't want to look too forward, but potentially you guys have the chance to play in Milwaukee. Coming off of this week with the momentum you guys had, how big would that be?

GREG GARD: It's huge. We played well in Milwaukee. I think we've been there three times. We've played well.

We've not played well there.

It's great for our fans obviously if we can be close, great for our students, great for our alums. Obviously the players we have that are from the local area, it's easier for their families.

But we're going to play a good team here in a few minutes. All the bad teams are on spring break. There's only good ones left, really good ones. So wherever we get sent. If it is Milwaukee, we'll use the week to prepare for whoever they pair us with.

Q. Greg, I guess I'm wondering, given how the offense struggled but was still a one- or two-possession game, I guess I'm wondering do you leave here in somewhat a weird way maybe bolstered it in terms of the confidence you have in this group?

GREG GARD: Oh, yeah, I have never lost confidence in this group even when we lost a week ago. I know some people thought the sky was falling. This group is really good, and this group is battle tested.

We didn't get shots to go down. That's what happens this time of year. You've got to be able to make plays and score. As much as our offense struggled, so did theirs. It wasn't like either team was -- it was two teams just not giving an inch. You've just got to make a shot or two more.

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