

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 12, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Northwestern Wildcats

Chris Collins

Nick Martinelli

Jayden Reid

Postgame Press Conference



Purdue - 81, Northwestern - 68

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Northwestern head coach Chris Collins, along with Nick Martinelli and Jayden Reid. We'll start off with an opening statement from Coach.

CHRIS COLLINS: Congratulations to Purdue. I thought they did what they were supposed to do today, playing us on the third game in three days, emotional game last night. I thought they came out with great energy.

Really their pop early knocked us back. I thought we were kind of a step slow to everything early. Their older guys really set the tone. We dug ourselves a big hole there in the first half.

Really proud of our team in the second half. I challenged our guys, we were down big, I said, guys, we're not going to tap out. We're not throwing the white towel. That's not who we are as a program. That's not how you guys are as individuals, as competitors. Let's go out. Let's try to win the first four minutes. Then let's try to win the next four minutes. Let's try and win the second half and see what happens.

If we chip away a little bit, we actually did start to put a little game pressure on them. They had to call a couple of timeouts. So I was super proud of our fight the whole way, led by this guy. I've talked about him a lot. So proud of everything he's meant to our program. More importantly this year with a really young team that was going through a lot of tough times with losses and tough play and sometimes guys' poor individual play, the big brother he was.

I just kept thinking back to the guys that were big brothers to him when he was struggling as a freshman, and for him to be that senior leader, especially when it got to a point in our season where we knew the goals that we had as team stuff were probably not going to happen for him to continue to show up every day to set the example for our younger players about what it means to be a Northwestern player, couldn't be more proud of him.

And Jayden as well, I thought Jayden played great in the second half.

It's tough to be at the end of the road for us, man. It always sucks. You're in the fight, you're in the fight, and then it's over. There's such an abrupt finality to the end of a season. I get up this morning, and you're ready to roll. You've got a big game against Purdue, and now it's over.

Really proud of this group for fighting through adversity through the year. Obviously proud of this guy. He's going down as one of the all time greats in our program's history.

Q. Nick, what's one memory you have playing at Northwestern you feel you're going to carry for the rest of your life?

NICK MARTINELLI: That's a good question. I have a ton of memories. I really think that Europe trip, getting to go out there with Ty, and I had already developed such meaningful relationships with Ty, Matt, Brooks. Getting to go out there, we just had a blast.

We really got to on a personal level connect with the coaches and the teammates and the bus rides to and from the game, just all those things. It's kind of a less stressful environment, and getting to really build those relationships in a place like that, I thought it was great.

Q. You've talked a lot about over the past two years how much it's weighed on you to not get back to the NCAA Tournament after Boo was able to get you there the last two seasons. When you think about your final years at Northwestern, how do you want to be remembered?



NICK MARTINELLI: I think for these young guys that are coming in hopefully, every person that played with me, they just look at a guy that worked relentlessly. That's all you can do, that's all you can control is work as hard as you possibly can and listen to the coaches.

So hopefully just a coachable guy who worked his butt off. That's really all I was focused on.

Q. Nick, you shared a moment with Coach Collins after you were checked out and you guys hugged for about a minute. What was that moment like for you?

NICK MARTINELLI: He means so much to me. Like he provided me with -- like I told him he's given me everything I could ask for and more. It's the way that he's kept it real with me this whole way. He's always honest with me. He pushes me to my limit, but at the same time, when I'm doing too much, he keeps it real and tells me to relax, rest.

It's a family endeavor. We talk about it. I'm super good friends with his son. His dad is reaching out to me, calling me. It's just like you just don't get that type of love, man. It's just all love, everything he's provided for me. I can't thank him enough. It's been such a great ride.

I know it's really going to hit me randomly one of these next couple days just how much I'm going to miss it, but I'm so appreciative of him.

Q. Nick, I was asking some of the younger players, I asked JR about this last night too, but the one thing they all said they're going to remember about you is your work ethic. I know you spoke in the past about where that work ethic comes from, that you learned from some from your big brothers in the program too, but why was that important for you to keep that work ethic all four years?

NICK MARTINELLI: There's multiple reasons for that. I think just, to name a couple of them, I think first is you don't want to let your team and coaches down. I was provided with an unbelievable opportunity to go to Northwestern, and at the time, I didn't really have many other big opportunities like this, like to be at the university playing in the Big Ten.

I always hold myself to a high standard, but I also always talk about my faith. With my faith comes so much gratitude. I talked about it yesterday with one of the reporters, just everyone congratulates me, you've worked so hard, you've done all this, but I truly believe it's a gift from God that he's given me.

Not everyone has that drive. Not everyone has that drive to show up each and every day. Sometimes I don't want to do it, but I have that extra voice in my head telling me you've got to push through, you've got to push through today. I definitely believe that's God, and he's definitely pushed me this whole way.

Q. Nick, no AP today. You're one of the two tallest players in the starting lineup going against Purdue, third game in three days. Where is this among one of the toughest games you've had to play?

NICK MARTINELLI: Definitely a tough one, but he talks about the guys before me, they've stepped in roles. We had Blake Smith starting in big games, at Maryland on the road, and we've gotten it done. There's never been excuses in this program, and that's something I love about it.

They have that faith in us that you kind of just think you can move a mountain because they're like, all right, you're going to do this because this is the culture. People have done it before. We have Ryan Langborg and Ty out at Maryland with Blake Smith starting picking up Jahmir Young at full court. Did you ever think you were going to see that? Probably not.

CHRIS COLLINS: I didn't.

NICK MARTINELLI: But we got it done, and it's all due to the scheme and that drive mentally.

Q. For Nick, you're finishing your college career as a four-year guy at Northwestern, which is kind of a rare breed in college basketball. Now your teammates, that's kind of the way things are now, have some decisions to make as far as with the transfer portal, NIL, so many things have changed since you came to Northwestern as a freshman. It's like not uncontroversial to say that you have to be looking at that kind of thing. What advice would you give to your teammates, those younger teammates, about what staying at a school like Northwestern for four years has given you?

NICK MARTINELLI: It's really all things that you can't see from outside the building. It's things you see from inside the building. The way they pushed you, it might not be for everybody. If it's not, maybe it's not the right place for you. But if you want to become the best version of yourself, I think this is the place to be.

You're constantly pushed, obviously in our building, but also in your classes. It's not ease to go to Northwestern as a student either, and if you want to become the best

version of yourself, no doubt.

Coach just talked about it, I was averaging two points a game. I probably wasn't even going to play if it weren't for injuries. But I just tried to be a sponge and listen to as much as possible and do it the right way.

I don't condemn anyone for looking at other schools. People get in your head. Obviously the thoughts are going to pass through your mind. Everybody inevitably wants to get the better thing, get more, do something different, try something else out. I don't condemn anybody for doing that, but for me, I found my place. This is my home. I've got so much love reciprocated because I stayed. It's been such a blessing and an honor.

Q. I wanted to ask you about in particular with Nick, here's a Chicago suburban kid, stayed four years, which now is a rarity almost. I'm sure your relationship with him goes back several more years where you watched him and different things. What's it like to watch somebody who you saw as a young boy, probably couldn't even shave, to get to the point where he's scoring 1,700 points and he's acting the part as a full grown adult that everybody respects?

CHRIS COLLINS: It's honestly what it's all about. We're all trying to win and lose -- win, not lose. I'm not trying to lose. It's all about wins and losses, and I get it. That's the business part of things is the results end of it.

One of the reasons I've always enjoyed being in college and being at schools -- like I've spent 26 years at either Duke or Northwestern, schools that attract guys that want -- you hear him -- that want those kind of relationships.

Nick went to my basketball camp when he was in elementary school. Him and my son are one year apart. Obviously when you're running a basketball camp and your kid's in it, you're always kind of watching his games more than the others. I've known Nick since he was fifth, sixth grade. His brother was a walk-on for us, who's a couple years older than him. So I followed his career. Being right in our area, we've known his family.

Just to see his progression, how he's just gotten better -- and not only that, how he's been able to become a young man. What's not lost in this -- he was a straight A student at Northwestern. I don't want to say he's done, he's got one more quarter left, but the guy never got a B. How about that? So we talk about all the time he's in the gym, but this is someone who has a standard of excellence with everything he does. Just couldn't be more proud of him.

Q. This was a game where you struggled to battle

Purdue on the glass. This is the second game where AP's been on the bench but in sweats. What was his illness, and why couldn't he go today?

CHRIS COLLINS: Yeah, he just wasn't able to go unfortunately. He wasn't cleared medically to play in the game. It hurt us. I mean, obviously having him last time we played these guys -- size, athleticism, strength -- with Kaufman-Renn and Cluff, just have another big body, and it really hurt us. To their credit, they took advantage of that.

The post-ups was one thing, but it was the glass, the offensive boards, and we just didn't have the size to combat it, especially when you're on the third game in three days. Trey hurt his wrist last night. I thought you guys probably saw his shooting wrist. He couldn't even shoot. He was out there battling with one hand.

So really appreciate him just trying to give what he could give today. Yeah, it was tough. We were a little bit undermanned. Obviously we were tired. Last night took a lot out of us. That was an emotional game, an emotional win.

We did our best. No excuses. We tried to prepare, get ready, and Purdue did what they're supposed to do, their energy, their pop. They came out and hit us with a hay maker early, and we're just fighting uphill the rest of the night.

Q. Coach, you spoke about Nick stepping into this big brother role and inspiring work ethic in the younger players. How exactly would you describe his impact both historically with the program and with the current roster?

CHRIS COLLINS: I think historically on the program for me, I've only been here 13 years, guys. Obviously growing up in Chicago, I followed Northwestern a little bit. I'm a basketball junkie. I know a lot of the players. I know a lot of the history of the guys who have come here before.

I just think, when you look at the things he was able to accomplish, the numbers speak for themselves, but also the winning component. He was a key part of two NCAA Tournament teams. He was a key part of our two most successful seasons in the history of the program.

He's got to go down -- I haven't looked at it, but with multiple 20-plus win seasons, 17 last year, 15 this year. He's got to be one of the winningest players in program history.

And just the way he carries himself, like I said, academic All-American, a guy who got better every year, a great



teammate, high character guy,. If you throw the upper echelon of players in a room, he belongs in that room.

It wasn't easy for him. We had higher aspirations. We didn't achieve our goals team-wise of what we wanted to do this year. We have no one to blame but ourselves. We lost a lot at the early part of the season. We didn't take care of business with a lot of close losses. We got to about a midpoint of the season, and it was kind of evident that it wasn't going in a direction towards postseason.

But his example of showing up every day as a senior and not making it just about him and not making it just about scoring records and winning a scoring title. It was always about winning. It was never about the individual stuff. It was about us getting better. It was about us trying to figure out how to win.

It's about him dragging these, Jake West and Tyler Kropp and Tre Singleton and Angelo Ciaravino -- all these guys that we're playing, trying to show them the way of what it takes to win. I'm grateful to him for that.

Q. I asked Nick this before about the moment that you guys shared when he checked out of the game, but for you, what was that like and what did you tell him?

CHRIS COLLINS: Those are always really hard. When you've coached over 100 games with somebody and had so many moments and you're just -- it's going through your head, the whole journey. It's super bittersweet because I'm so proud of him. To see the standing ovation he got and all those things is pretty cool, but it's just a personal moment.

It's a hug and to tell each other you love him, and I'll be his biggest fan forever. I'm just sad I won't have a chance to coach him anymore.

Q. You're a basketball junkie, you said so yourself. Hope you don't mind I'm going to ask about an opponent. Braden Smith has climbed up the NCAA ranks for assists, passing someone that you competed against in Ed Cota, and he's lurking on someone who is your former teammate, Bobby Hurley.

CHRIS COLLINS: I know.

Q. Can you put into perspective for me what you've seen from him these past four years? What are the common characteristics that these men and that Braden has with these men?

CHRIS COLLINS: First of all, I'm afraid to look at my phone because I'm sure Bobby has texted me with some

expletives about not doing the job to keep his record safe. Sorry, Bobby.

Anyway, Braden is a special player. It's been an honor to compete against him these past four years, to admire his greatness. He's another guy kind of like Nick, unheralded recruit, last minute a scholarship opens up at Purdue, they take him. He starts every game his whole career and is going to be Player of the Year and a first team guy and potentially the all time assist king in the history of college basketball. To think about that is just an incredible, incredible feat.

His level of consistency, his smarts, and he's been a big winner. This is a championship level player. It wasn't just about assists. He's won Big Ten Championships. He's been in a National Championship Game.

It was really cool tonight just and all the day and age, and you had asked Nick about it, to look out on the floor and to see four guys -- Kaufman-Renn, Fletcher Loyer, Braden Smith, and Nick Martinelli -- four guys that have stayed with their program for four years. That was pretty cool. So I root for that because I really admire players that stick through -- I think his freshman year, did they lose to a 16 seed or a 15? It wasn't all just roses. They had to go through stuff too to get to this point.

I have a lot of respect for him. He's been a great, great player in this league, the way he's carried himself, the way he's won.

Terrific example, I have a young point guard on my team. I want to use Braden Smith as an example for Jake as he develops, as he gets better as someone you want to aspire to be like. Great, great player.

Q. Last off-season, you brought in eight new players, five freshmen, three transfers, flipped over half of the roster. You ended up during the season a little bit confused about why the team was struggling to shoot as well as you thought they would during the summer, kind of talking about the way that you built this team before. What lessons had you really learned from kind of the last transfer portal this past cycle that you're really taking into this next iteration of building the next Northwestern Wildcats?

CHRIS COLLINS: It's a great question. I think everyone is trying to navigate this landscape. Now that the season is over, you're in the fight. You're always kind of thinking about when you have a program, the future and putting things together and what.

I'm really anxious to be able to get with administration and



get with my staff. We've got to be better in what you mentioned, and that's not a knock on players. We didn't have enough. We weren't equipped with what we needed going through the grind of the Big Ten this year. Again, that's not -- I mean, I'm talking about myself. I got to be better. We've got to do a better job with roster construction, making sure we get the right kind of guys that are going to be good players here.

Also, a big part of it, it's big business now, right? The alignment and studying what some of the programs are doing around us, especially peer programs, the level of investment. In order to win now at the high major level, there's got to be unbelievable alignment from everybody, not just the coaching staff. I mean that presidential level, like people -- you've got to want to compete in football and basketball, and you've got to invest, and it's got to be important.

It's got to trickle down to the administration and coaching, and everybody's got to be in alignment in order to win because the programs that are winning, that's what they're doing. They're aligned. There's a commitment to winning with resources, with investment. There's no reason that we can't be one of those places in my mind. I'm fully convinced. But it's going to take everybody together to want to do that.

I'm excited. I love our AD, Mark Jackson. He came from Villanova. He's won National Championships there. He was at USC before that, National Championships in football. He knows what it takes. This is a big time for us. We don't have a president, right? This is going to be a huge hire when it comes to athletics. Does our new president that we bring in, is that going to be a commitment?

These are my opinions, I've always felt like if you're at a high level academic school and you strive to have the best undergraduate experience and the best hospital and Kellogg School of Business and all these graduate programs and Medill and all these things, why wouldn't we also strive to be great in athletics? There's a standard of excellence. We should want that, and we have the means to do that.

So the program has been unbelievably committed to me over 13 years they've stuck with me through some lows, and I've stuck with the program through some super highs because I love what we're trying to build here.

This is going to be a huge off-season from top to bottom. We've got to really examine because you have to evolve. Maybe some of the things that I'm doing and what I thought and maybe some of the ways -- maybe that's not what

needs to be done. I want to win. I want to win. I'm a competitor. You guys know that. I want to win the right way. I want to win with good people. I want to compete in this league.

We've shown -- we had a second place finish. We had a third place finish. I'm anxious and excited to get a new president, to get together and everybody and hopefully have a commitment to saying, you know what, we want to do this. We want to do this. I'm all in on doing everything in my power. I've got to be better.

I never use index fingers. It's always thumbs, man. It's always thumbs. I always feel -- everything is accountable to me. I take accountability for what the record was this year. I'm excited to roll up my sleeves and figure out how we can get back to the upper echelon of the league. Can't wait to get started this spring with that.

Q. You said last night after the Indiana game there's no quit in this team. Obviously they showed that tonight just like they have all season. As this team goes through that evolution that you're hoping for, makes those changes that you're hoping for, how do you hope to keep that part of this team's culture, that willingness to keep fighting no matter what, keep that as a big part of this team's DNA?

CHRIS COLLINS: Hopefully a lot of you guys have been here with me -- some of these guys have been here for 13 years from the start. Some of these other guys, four or five. That's always been a fabric of who we are. That's kind of what I've hung my hat on, that you show up every day. You compete, you fight, you work, and that's what, win or lose, we always pick ourselves up off the mat, and we keep fighting.

That's not going to change. We're going to continue to find the right guys that come in here that share those values. We've got to be better. We've got to be better. We weren't good enough this year. I've got to be better. We've got to be better. We've got to upgrade in a lot of areas, and our young guys have got to get better.

We have to have key retention obviously, that's a big part of this thing. That will be once the dust settles after this weekend and get an opportunity to meet with players, and you get a little bit of extra time now. The portal doesn't open until after the Final Four.

It's going to be a really big off-season for our future, and I know my staff and I, we're looking forward to seeing what we can build for next year.

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