

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 12, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

UCLA Bruins

Mick Cronin

Donovan Dent

Tyler Bilodeau

Postgame Press Conference



UCLA - 72, Rutgers - 59

MICK CRONIN: They told me Donny just hit the first triple double in Big Ten Tournament history, so congratulations, my man. Congratulations to Coach Pikiell, I thought his kids, to have a whole new team and have the youngest team in high major basketball, they played hard all year. He's a great, great coach. Just needs more support. Hopefully he'll get it.

Onward for us. We already know who we play tomorrow night, and I'm already thinking about that. Happy to get the win.

Q. Donovan, were you aware that you were approaching that, you grabbed that rebound and were back on the attack. Did you know that you were kind of on the brink of history, and what did it feel like to make history tonight?

DONOVAN DENT: I didn't know until the under four media timeout, and one of my teammates was like you've got to get one more rebound. I was hunting for it there at the end for sure.

MICK CRONIN: Now I'm going to lie to him for sure so he'll keep rebounding. I'm going to tell him you need two for a triple double, and he'll keep rebounding.

DONOVAN DENT: I was crashing for sure at the end, and it felt good to finally get it.

Q. Donovan, what was clicking for you on all cylinders that allowed you to contribute effectively in all aspects of the game?

DONOVAN DENT: When you have so many weapons on your offense, the game comes smoothly. My shots get open because I have such good teammates around me that they don't want to leave. They just make the game a lot easier for me, and it's a blessing.

Q. I want to ask Donovan about your rebounds. You had four offensive boards. Was that a change in philosophy, in crashing the boards, or was that just something, a part of your game you want to explore?

DONOVAN DENT: At halftime Coach was telling us we need more second chances because we were just getting one shots, and it's hard to win games like that. Early in the second half I was just crashing. I was either in the corner, and Trent was up top so he would get back. And we were just crashing -- Trent had a good offensive rebound as well. He got free throws out of it. We just flipped our mindset in the second half crashing with the offensive rebounds.

Q. You had so many memorable plays. Two of them for me was one you saved a loose ball over your shoulder in the first half. Second half you were falling out of bounds, got an offensive rebound and got it to Eric for a layup. Did you have a favorite play out there tonight?

DONOVAN DENT: Definitely the one where Book blocked it, and I threw it over my head. I don't know how it got to someone, but it did. We were just hustling, we changed our mindset on defense, so I'm just hustling for loose balls.

Q. Donovan, how meaningful for you is it to have the first triple double in Big Ten history?

DONOVAN DENT: It's amazing. I didn't know until they told me on the broadcast. That's a great feeling.

Q. Tyler, obviously the offense didn't have it at certain times tonight. What does it say about this team that you guys are still able to keep in this game when you maybe didn't have it shooting-wise?

TYLER BILODEAU: Offense missing shots and that type of stuff is going to happen. We've got to play defense, and we've got to rebound. Yeah, stay together and try to get what we want on offense. Eventually shots are going to fall for us.

Q. You guys feel like you have unlocked something on the defensive end as a team? If so, what is it?

TYLER BILODEAU: I mean, for sure. When we're all playing for each other, playing hard, Coach Cronin style defense, that's when we're successful. We've got to keep that up.

DONOVAN DENT: It's just fun. Like we weren't hitting shots. We were in the huddle having great energy because we were playing so good on defense and just playing hard. It's a better game for us. When shots aren't falling, it's fine, just pick it up on the defensive side. I think we're doing a great job of that right now.

Q. Tyler, what's your favorite part about playing with Donovan? He obviously can impact a game so many ways.

TYLER BILODEAU: Oh, man, so many things. Just his ability to break down defense. It's so fun to watch. It makes my job pretty easy when he gets me some wide open shots. It's just fun to see him slither around, get open, get in the paint, make great passes. Also, he's a great teammate. Shout out to Donny.

MICK CRONIN: Tyler's a politician. He likes the fact that Donny gets him shots. So do I. That's why I like him.

Q. Coach, I have this written down. I don't remember exactly what it is. 65 assists, 4 turnovers in the last six games. What's been unlocked with Donovan here?

MICK CRONIN: It was just I've tried to hold him to a higher standard, which is what I do with all of my guys. Try to prepare them to be grown men. We try to prepare to play the best team on our schedule. That's what you've got to try to demand at all times.

Just trying to raise his level as a man and as a player. So I said this, Oscar Robertson said this years ago, you can't -- you're not different on and off the floor, and he was too careless with the ball at New Mexico. Super talented obviously. But his turnovers -- nobody with his talent should turn the ball over, period. Way too talented.

So if he can be a more responsible person, he'll be a more responsible player. He'll be way more successful in playing professional basketball and in his life as well. I

think that it's congruent.

Q. Coach, when you guys only shoot 38 percent, how valuable is it to have a guy like Donny, 12 points, the rebounds, the assists. What does it do for you when you're struggling to shoot the ball?

MICK CRONIN: He can create offense for your team. I don't think I'd call -- first of all, I give Coach Pikiell credit. Rutgers is always hard to play against since he's been their coach. They're physical. They've got fast guys. They're young, but they're strong and they're fast, and they're extremely well coached.

That said, I don't think I'd call it a good game offensively tonight, but I've been trying to tell these guys, you can't -- if you have to score 80 to win, you're going to be going home early. That's anybody in the tournament, this tournament and the next tournament.

We didn't shoot it well tonight. There was a lot of wide open shots. You thought we were going to blow it open late in the first half because you've watched us play and those guys knock those shots in, for people that usually watch us. Hopefully we saved some of them for tomorrow.

Yeah, it's just you've got to be able to take defense on the road. Your jump shot doesn't always go on the road with you.

Q. Building off of that question, this is the worst you guys have shot in a win this season. How are you able to get it done even though the offense didn't?

MICK CRONIN: They scored 59 points. Bob Huggins 101. You got to be able to win when you don't make shots. He got in the Hall of Fame that way. He taught me that.

I think one time when I was on the bench with him, we won nine games in a row shooting under 40 percent, like the late '90s at Cincinnati. You've got to be able to win when you don't make shots. If not, you're an average team because you're not making them every game.

I want to give Rutgers some credit now for our offense.

Q. What's gone into the improved defense?

MICK CRONIN: Just trying to do everything -- I told you at one press conference I'm constantly pushing, trying to push buttons. I've got a lot of buttons to push before 8:00 tomorrow night because they took us to the wood shed last time we played.

I think our bench has helped. Guys know that, if you don't



defend, you're coming out. I think that's reality. Just trying to get guys to realize that it's contagious both ways. It's not just defense, it's rebounding. We're standing watching the whole first half, and our guards changed the game with their offensive rebounding.

So I told them at halftime we need to be like Illinois. You know we're going to shoot. We can shoot. We spread the floor. When the guy's wide open, you should already be on the run for the rebound. Why are you standing there? What are you doing?

I thought Donny and Trent really changed the game. We had five offensive rebounds to go from up 6 to up 15 in that stretch. I don't know for sure, but I think most of them were the guards.

Q. You've been around the game a long time. You're at an iconic institution, UCLA. What's it like for you? You've got these young men that are in your program on the West Coast, a national name. What's it like to have UCLA winning and what that does for your fan base and alumni all throughout the Midwest?

MICK CRONIN: You mean us to be in the Big Ten now? One thing we tell people with the recruiting piece, the travel is obviously harder, but your brand is going to be more Nationwide, right? More people see us now because in the old days you played Thursday, Saturday. They could only put one game on ESPN or Fox or whatever. Nobody had the Pac-12 network anyway. It was the worst run thing in history. So it was hard to see us nationally, and you're sleeping.

Being in the Big Ten has helped our national exposure, and that helps our player. I think our university speaks for itself. It's worldwide. It's not just national, it's worldwide. So for me, just being a part of our university, we're a small part of it. We're a great marketing part, and I think the university grew under Coach Wooden and surpassed a lot of the other UC schools in our system, and if you were to say -- there's ten of us. The difference in our schools is athletics. That's what separates UCLA, and it's helped propel the rest of the university to being world class and ranked Number 1 many years in a row as a public institution.

But being in the Big Ten helps with that. Again, you're playing on six nights a week there's Big Ten games. So we just get way more exposure. Just a lot more plane rides, my friend, and cold weather, which I'm not for. It was 90 degrees at my house today.

Q. Rutgers averages 71 points per game. You held them to 59 tonight. What stuck out to you that you

guys did defensively?

MICK CRONIN: We tried -- look, I thought in all fairness Tariq Francis in the first half missed some open looks. I told our guys in the first couple timeouts we're getting lucky. He was 0 for 5, and I think he had four great looks. Things we're not going to get away with tomorrow.

So the film will tell me if I'm right on that. Now, I thought early in the second half we were playing much better half-court defense, but we lost 13 a few times. Zrno, I believe you say his name. So he kept them in it.

Scouting report and just commitment. We'll find out tomorrow how good our defense is, and if we win, we'll find out more Saturday. So we'll see.

Q. You always talk about how relentless you are with Donny in terms of him facilitating the ball.

MICK CRONIN: Taking care of the ball.

Q. Taking care of the ball. It's obvious the numbers, but how have you seen Donny kind of rise to the challenge and accept that coaching approach to him?

MICK CRONIN: I think once he realized that it was a fight he wasn't going to win -- which I told him when I recruited him. There's only one person in charge. It's not a democracy, and you're going to take care of the ball, and you're talented enough.

But changing habits is -- but I give him all the credit. He signed on for it. I don't think he understood what it was going to entail, but he's gotten so much better along the way. You guys are talking about that, and his numbers are unbelievable, but I need him to show leadership and defense, back to defense.

Like we got Eric, Trent, Tyler, Donny, Skyy Clark is always after it, and I challenged Xavier Booker to block two shots tonight. You can't just play defense because I'm yelling at you. You guys want to win or you don't. You're tough enough to do hard things or we're going home. So it's been Donny's defense as well.

Like I said, if you dove on a floor, it might send a helluva message to your teammates -- for a ball -- because it might send the other message if you don't. He's come a long way, folks, so we'll see. Big game tomorrow.

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