

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 12, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Rutgers Scarlet Knights

Steve Pikiell

Jamichael Davis

Postgame Press Conference

UCLA - 72, Rutgers - 59

THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by Rutgers head Coach Steve Pikiell and student-athlete Jamichael Davis.

STEVE PIKIELL: I always appreciate the Big Ten tournament and how they run this first class. They do a great job. I always love the environment. This is one of my favorite parts of the year.

Just disappointed can't keep playing. I think this team has just gotten better and better over the last month. I wish we had another month with this group. Unfortunately, we don't.

I just brought my captain up here today, and Emmanuel's last game, and he's really -- first of all, he's getting his Masters degree, proud of him. Came in with academics and a bad knee and just kept getting better. Really proud of him. He took some grief every now and then. He came in as Cliff's backup, and he just kept getting better and better. I really appreciate him.

He became an everyday work guy and a great student, a great kid, never an ounce of trouble, never missed a day of practice, never late for anything. So really, really proud. He became an every single day you could count on him guy. We're going to miss him. We're going to miss him. He led us in rebounding, blocked shots.

He'll continue playing. A lot of agents have been calling. He'll continue playing his basketball career, and I think his best days are ahead of him. He's only been playing for a few years. So I want to thank him.

Rutgers Nation that came out, the people are awesome. The cheerleaders, and the band is always great, my favorite people. We'll miss the seniors there too and all the



great things they do for us and make our environment at home one of the greatest home court environments going.

Give UCLA a lot of credit. Mick is one of the great coaches. He really is. Last time we gave up 98 points to him. We tweaked a few things today, not a lot of time to prepare. They just had too much fire power. Their point guard really good, obviously elite. Bilodeau, elite. We played hard. Proud of our guys for the fight but couldn't get it done.

Q. Jamichael, back-and-forth start to the game. You guys score the first 4, they score 11, you guys score 8, they score 7. What do you think you think allowed you guys to go back and forth at the start of the game?

JAMICHAEL DAVIS: Execution on both ends, but we can't go back and forth, you know. We've got to get stops, throw them out of their rhythm, and try to be as physical as we can.

Q. As the captain and one of the veterans on this team, what have you seen from this full season of the freshman nucleus here?

JAMICHAEL DAVIS: A lot of growth, their hard work, them just wanting to get better and just learn. They're young. They've still got a lot of time. I'm very proud of them.

Q. What does being the captain this year meant to you?

JAMICHAEL DAVIS: It meant a lot. Coach wanted to challenge me with that, and I was willing to step up. I'm excited and happy for the season we had. Proud of our guys and the way we fought, the way we've gotten better throughout these months, and I couldn't be more proud of them.

Q. Of course you guys had a phenomenal game yesterday, you came out today. What do you most attribute to where you guys fell flat?

JAMICHAEL DAVIS: Like they got a little momentum. I



don't think we did a good job of throwing them off their rhythm. They were physical with us. They were hitting shots. We didn't really make it tough for them.

But I'm proud of the guys. We fought. I think Lino, he had great minutes. I think everybody who checked in gave us good minutes. I'm proud of them. So proud of E, senior, last go round. I'm just proud of him.

Q. Coach, Lino as a freshman led Rutgers with 17 points tonight. What stood out to you in his performance, and what excites you the most about his growth and future?

STEVE PIKIELL: What I'm most excited about is his progress. From the start of the year till the end, I mean, he learned how to practice hard, became a film guy. He understood what practice meant. He wasn't a great practice player early on, didn't realize how that carried over to the games.

I think J-Mike's been a really good mentor to him too, kind of taught him to you to become an everyday guy, getting to the training room early, just the things you need to do to play college basketball in the Big Ten.

You just saw his confidence soar early in the year he couldn't finish at the rim and really struggled from 3-point land. He just continued to grow, and he put the work in. It's a hard journey for freshmen. It's the oldest time in college basketball too. Guys are 24, 25 years old, and he's 18 years old. You've got to learn through the obstacles the season brings.

He really did an unbelievable job. Like I said, I wish we had another month because it was like having a new player at the end. Looking forward to him improving. He's got to continue to get stronger and just get better. He proved that he could be a really good player in this league.

Q. Steve, obviously you want to keep as many of these guys developed as possible. What's going to be the pitch for them this off-season when you are recruiting for your roster?

STEVE PIKIELL: We have a lot of great things at Rutgers. I don't know if it's the -- Keli is here, and she's done an unbelievable job of helping us. I think these guys like Rutgers. I'm excited about our new president. I'm excited about our new athletic director. I'm excited that I have Rob Sullivan, a GM that I've never had. I'm excited about all the people that we've hired and how we've moved in that direction that is college basketball right now and college athletics.

Keli got me excited about the future, and these young guys too are part of this. They have a lot of choices, and that's what happens in today's day and age. We'll just see who wants to be a part of Rutgers basketball. It's a really good brand. Sold out every game. It's a great fan base and great league and great opportunities for them, and it's a great education. Top 15 public university in the country. It's an excellent academic school. My daughter goes there, three graduates in my own family. I can attest to that. It's a great place.

There's a lot to sell. We've developed guys. We've got guys in the pros. I was watching Ron Harper play his brother the other day, one of the awesome days I had. Ace Bailey scored a bunch of points. I was watching Cam Spencer do his thing too. It's been really exciting. That was never the case at Rutgers. We've got a lot to sell. Looking forward to sitting down with these guys and seeing where they're at.

Q. You mentioned the last month of the season. That must be a lot of improvement for you guys, especially the freshmen. How important is it to keep the freshmen nucleus that you guys have so they can continue to grow and develop over the last month.

STEVE PIKIELL: It's important to add some pieces too and important to keep the guys. I want guys that want to be at Rutgers too. That's a big part of this too. It's got to be a two way street, not a one way street. We'll see. I'm excited about the future and excited about the opportunities that we have to make our program better.

Q. As much as this sport has turned into almost a professional product, also with the travel, you kind of almost have to treat it that way as much as you guys are going on the road, especially having a younger team like you do. How did you see them grow with kind of a professional mindset taking it in every aspect? Whether it's towards academics, towards travel, it's becoming a full-fledged, almost a professional mindset in basketball, and how much did they grow in that area this year?

STEVE PIKIELL: That's really the fun part too of coaching. It's still -- you're going to say it's professional, but they're 19-year-old kids, 18-year-old kids that have issues and have problems. As a coach, you want to see them grow and see them get better and enjoy their time too in college.

You see it a lot. I had seven freshmen this year, a couple of them from overseas too. You've really got to help them with mentorship through that. They're not adults yet, and they don't have experience playing in the Big Ten and traveling and doing all those things.

I will tell you, this group, they became pros in how to prepare. They take care of business academically, they get in the training room early. They really grew in that area. Proud of them. They watch film. When they first started, they didn't realize the importance of it. Still enjoy that journey with them too.

Even my sophomore class, and J-Mike up here today, he's going to graduate, one of the first ones in his family to get a degree. That means a lot to me. I know it means a lot to our president too. Those things are still important. They get overlooked throughout all of this. Every one of my guys is graduating. E's getting a Masters degree. I still enjoy that part of it too.

I think that's an important part. I don't want to miss out on that. I think playing basketball is awesome and the experiences that they have here are awesome, but there's some great experiences here too at Rutgers. Our freshman class started to understand that.

Q. Coach, you have a history of training up these young guys, getting them developed. You talk about how old college basketball is now. With the new NIL initiatives, does that change your approach to roster construction this off-season?

STEVE PIKIELL: It's a different world. Yeah, I'd like to get older, that's for sure. That means keeping some of our older guys too. The portal is old. That's what it is. Usually kids are experienced and have played a little bit and stuff.

There's a lot of fun opportunities that are going to come up. We're going to get kids that want to be at Rutgers and want to be a part of something that's going to be really good. I'm excited about those opportunities.

Yeah, to get older is probably a good thing.

Q. Tariq was held to six points tonight. What do you think UCLA did defensively to limit his offensive production?

STEVE PIKIELL: They did a great job. They sent bodies at him. They put size on him. I think, when you watch us play, especially the night before, then you see 29 points. Mick is a great coach, and he's a really good defensive coach. He was well prepared. He really was.

Riq's got to fight through that. That's what's going to happen to you. When you start scoring the points he scored this year, you're going to have days like that. He can do a lot more than score. That was my one conversation with him in the huddles. You can pass the

ball. You can rebound. You're a facilitator. He got really a lot better as the year went on in facilitating and making assists and doing a really good job with that.

But UCLA did a really good job. They did it in the first game too.

Q. You spoke with some finality about Manny, this being his last game. He said he's going to apply for a waiver next year. Do you have any update on that?

STEVE PIKIELL: Everybody applies for waivers. I don't have anything on that.

Q. If he got one and got another year, would you want him to be back at Rutgers?

STEVE PIKIELL: There's so much out there, I have no idea. He has to go through all kinds of steps. He's not the only one in the country. There's going to be a million kids figuring that stuff out.

He had a great career for us. I appreciate him.

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