

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 13, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Wisconsin Badgers

Greg Gard

Nick Boyd

John Blackwell

Postgame Press Conference



Wisconsin - 91, Illinois - 88

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Wisconsin coach Greg Gard along with student-athletes Nick Boyd and John Blackwell.

GREG GARD: Obviously a tremendous college basketball game. I can't say enough about the heart and the toughness and the growth that my group has shown from back late in the fall into the 2026 part of the calendar and how we've matured and have tremendous toughness to us to be able to come back from 15 down. It speaks to the character of these guys and the willpower of them.

Illinois is a terrific team. Brad's got a terrific team. Both games have been overtime, and they've damn near been the same score. I think it was 91-89 at Champaign. So just two really, really good teams.

Obviously like yesterday, my backcourt is tremendous. These two guys were terrific, but their teammates also do a really good job of helping along the way with putting space on the floor and the rebounding and those type of things.

Obviously a tremendous team win. We'll get some rest and get ready for tomorrow afternoon.

Q. Nick, throughout the game, you were hyping up the Badger fans in attendance and proudly showing the Wisconsin name on your jersey. What does the fan base and team mean to you on a personal note?

NICK BOYD: Yeah I mean, that's what March is about, you know. Just bring all the fans together. It's just awesome to have them here. I had a great time, like you said, just getting them going. That's what I love to do. I'm

all about community. When March comes around, usually the fan base pops out. We're just having fun.

Q. This is a question for both of you guys. It's very rare for a duo to score 30 points in a conference tournament game, so congratulations. What's one aspect of each other's game that helps elevate your game?

JOHN BLACKWELL: For me, I would say his aggressiveness getting downhill. He just opens up the floor for everybody. He sees the game. If their bodies are there, he's constantly kicking it out. Whether he has zero points and there's a minute left or he has 30, he's constantly staying aggressive trying to get to the paint.

NICK BOYD: Like he said, my aggressiveness, and I'm emotional out there, but I just love his poise in a situation, like he just stays poised and is very focused, and that rubs off on me.

I don't know, man, it took us some time -- now I know where he's going to be at all times. As we keep growing together and get more and more games together, God willing, it's just going to keep being special.

Q. This is to both of you guys. There were six minutes in the first half where Illinois had a 21-3 run against you guys. In the timeout after that kind of run they had, what was going on in the team huddle that allowed you guys to turn it around like you did?

JOHN BLACKWELL: I think we were all just encouraging each other. He's more the emotional guy who hypes each other -- like we're telling the guys we're good, and I'm telling guys to calm down, relax.

The game is about runs. They're going to have their runs and we're going to have our runs. As long as we weather the storm, that was their punch, and we just keep punching back.

NICK BOYD: Yeah, like he said, just the way we're built. We could be down 20 and we can still come back. It's the



way we're built, how we can shoot and how spread the floor is and just our tempo.

I'm just telling him, I'm making sure in the huddle we're not pointing fingers. We're just staying together and encouraging each other to get one stop at a time. That's what we did. We chopped it down and down and down, and it broke loose.

Q. Nick, the first minute of the game, double tech, can you talk about that there, and what was exchanged with the head butt early on?

NICK BOYD: Just two competitive players out there on the court. Where I'm from, someone walk up on you, you've got to keep the same energy. It was nothing personal. He's a great player.

That's the type of stuff I love because that's how I grew up, and it gets me going.

Q. Nick, for you, what will it mean for you to on the game tomorrow, to go up against an old coach in Dusty May? You guys have a history before, a Final Four before. What has he meant to you in your college career? What would it mean for you to face him again with what's at stake tomorrow?

NICK BOYD: It's just an honor. He's a big reason why I'm in this position I am today, his mentorship and just showing me how to be a good human being. He set that example while I was with him for a couple years. I'm happy for him. He's come a long way. I seen him when he had zero championships, and I don't know how many he has now.

It's just awesome we get to square off again. When the ball goes in the air, may the best man win.

Q. John, you mentioned getting downhill, was that a big emphasis in the second half, especially with the way you guys were shooting the 3? Do you feel like that was what shifted this whole game in the second half?

JOHN BLACKWELL: Yeah, I think we did a great job of it at their place of just getting downhill, playing off two feet and kicking it out to shooters. So I think today they were running us off the line, and then we just found cracks, tried to get there, finish off two feet, and play poised in there.

Q. In the postseason, you're coming off back-to-back close emotional wins, and you're about to play your third game in three days. How do you rest, recover, and get ready to go again tomorrow?

NICK BOYD: Ain't no rest, you know what I'm saying? No rest. You've got to keep going. You get to play -- Michigan, right? No. 3 or No. 2 team in the country. By the time you get out there and the lights is bright, ain't nothing to think about.

You talk about rest? We'll play X amount of games, and you've got to come out fighting. If you're not excited and ready to go for a game like tomorrow, don't even lace 'em up.

JOHN BLACKWELL: If my dad is watching, happy birthday.

Q. Coach, how has this team evolved from the game at Nebraska when you guys took a hit, and you had some things to say about the team. How has it evolved since that time to the team that we're seeing now?

GREG GARD: I think it's a credit to them for how they recognized how we had to improve, and the improvement. There were things on the court, but there were probably as many things in our physical and mental makeup that we had to improve upon and grow through, and they've done that.

It's been a joy to watch them come together, the chemistry, the connectivity. It just took us time because it's a relatively new group. Seven of the top eight or nine are new to our program.

Like I said, it's just a credit to them for taking coaching, embracing the fact that we had to get better, and they took ownership in it. The results speak for themselves. They've done it. They answered the challenge. They followed the instructions of what the coaching staff put out in front of them of how we needed to get better and what it was going to entail, and they attacked it.

They've done a terrific job with it. Today's another example of just the perseverance and resilience that we didn't have back in late 2025 or early 2026, but they've grown immensely.

Q. Coach, you said it yourself, basically the same game as last time against Illinois. Same narrative too, you're down big late in the second half, forced overtime. What do you feel you were able to exploit in Illinois both times to get this same result, even though you're down big in the second half?

GREG GARD: I don't know if you exploit anything. It's two really, really good teams with terrific players. If you peel back the onion, so to speak, in terms of how they play and how we play, it's very identical. We both shoot a lot of 3s.

We're both analytically driven with rim 2s and 3s. We're both built to do that in terms of the makeup of our rosters.

Our guys were able to continue to find ways to make plays. I thought we rebounded the ball well, better than what we did yesterday, and that was a big piece because Illinois attacks the offensive glass exceptionally well. For us to be able to do it even down two guys from when we played in Champaign, it just speaks to, like I said, the internal fortitude of my group that they were able to find a way.

Like I said, Brad's got a great team. Hopefully they do really well in the tournament. I think they're built to do some damage. They're a hard cover. They're hard to guard because of how they spread you out. I'm sure we're hard to guard if I flip the mirror around the other way. Like I said, we're just able to make some plays on both ends of the floor to get the advantage down the stretch.

Q. You out rebounded one of the better rebounding teams in the nation. How did you approach the mentality and game plan coming into the game, particularly around the rebounding side against a much larger lineup?

GREG GARD: Rebounding, there's a point of it that's physical in terms of size and those things, but I felt a lot of rebounding is what's underneath your hood, meaning inside of you, and your grit and your toughness. You can rebound against size if you continue to have the fight to you and some toughness.

I thought, other than a couple times, I thought in the second half, down in front, we didn't check as hard as we needed to on a switch, and Ivic got a putback. Buy and large, I thought we made their second opportunities relatively difficult. It's hard because they shoot a lot of 3s like we do, so you've got uncharacteristic bounces. You've got long rebounds coming out. It's not necessarily always a defensive rebounder's fault that we don't get the ball, it's just the angle and distance that the ball rebounds at.

But like I said, our pursuit of it I thought and our fight to make sure we minimize extra possessions, I think was exceptional.

Q. This is now six wins where you've trailed by double digits. Why has this team been able to do that?

GREG GARD: Thankfully it's a 40-minute game, so we have more time. I think a lot of it ties into what I've talked about here in terms of how our resilience and toughness and perseverance have grown. Our ability to turn the page within possessions, meaning something doesn't go well, we don't dwell on it. I've said all along they turn the page

better than their head coach does at times. That happens from possession to possession, half to half, game to game.

They handle adversity much better than they did back in November, December, early January. It's a long game. We had 75 possessions today. If two or three in a row don't go your way, let's work to get it back in the next two or three knowing you've got a lot of time left to play.

With our pace of play and our ability to score -- I think in the game today just overall, the 3-point line, you can eradicate a lead or catch up or lose a lead in a short amount of time because the possessions can happen quick, and you bang in a few 3s.

Momentum's never neutral. It's either with you or against you. You're constantly fighting to have it on your side, and when you don't, you can't pout or dwell about things not going your way. This group has done a terrific job of growing into that identity.

Q. Outside of Boyd and Blackwell, the rest of the team today went 7 for 29. What's it going to take to get the rest of the offense going outside of those two guys?

GREG GARD: Hell, when your two guys score 69 of your 91 points. Look at Rapp, four assists, no turnovers. Bieliauskas four assists, no turnovers. There's eight buckets that they assisted on. Rapp and Carrington didn't shoot the ball particularly well from 3. I thought Bieliauskas turned down a few. We kept talking about he had some opportunities to pull the trigger on them.

When you have two guards like that and their ability to make plays and Nick has, what, six assists. So you ride the hot hand, you ride the game -- the game is a guard's game, especially this time of year. To be able to have two really, really good ones like we do, I'd be an idiot not to put the ball in their hands more often than not.

Q. You're one of two teams that have beaten Michigan this season. When you think back to that game, what has to go well for you guys tomorrow with this short turn?

GREG GARD: They're a terrific team. You've got to make shots. You've got to be able to guard. Mara is a handful. Lendeborg is a handful. You go up-and-down the list. Point guard Cadeau. They're well put together in terms of the pieces fit really well together, how they play off one another is exceptional. They can hurt you inside. They can shoot 3s. They make it hard because of how they defend, and Mara can take up a lot of space in the paint.

So you have to be -- I think we made 15, 16 3s in Ann

Arbor. We'll have to get our rest tonight and start diving through film. I know the assistants have been working ahead of that. And then get ready as we prep and rest up over the next, I don't know, 20 hours or so.

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