

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 13, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

UCLA Bruins

Mick Cronin

Donovan Dent

Trent Perry

Postgame Press Conference



UCLA - 88, Michigan State - 84

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by UCLA coach Mick Cronin as well as student-athletes Trent Perry and Donovan Dent.

MICK CRONIN: Tremendous effort by our players. Michigan State obviously a great team, great coach. We matched their physicality and played unbelievable first half.

Guys never flinched, kept knocking in big shots, both these guys next to me and Skyy Clark. Four guys in double figures. Obviously to win this game with Tyler only playing 10 minutes is monumental for us, monumental for us.

Brandon Williams, big night, nine points and four rebounds. Obviously we've got to get more out of Xavier Booker and Steve Jamerson next couple days. Let you guys bang out your questions.

Q. Trent, how do you make six free throws in a row in 36 seconds in high pressure situations like that.

TRENT PERRY: Just staying calm and trusting the work and having the trust in my teammates. Even Coach, we're in the huddle they're saying you're going to knock these down. We're going on the other end.

Q. Do you have a breathing routine that goes through your head?

TRENT PERRY: You see at the beginning of my routine, I'm just kind of looking at the basket, breathing, taking everything in, and staying true to myself.

Q. Trent, the guy next to you, Donny, hits big free

throws late, two steals late in the game to seal it. What can you say about your teammate there?

TRENT PERRY: He's all right. I'm playing.

(Laughter).

Four steals, 12-2 assist-to-turnover ratio, he's amazing. He's amazing, though. That's our PG, and he's finding everybody.

Q. How do you guys feel about this kind of statement after the Michigan State game in East Lansing, kind of a low point. To come back tonight with such a strong statement, what does it say about the way you guys have responded and played this month?

DONOVAN DENT: I talked about it yesterday. We have a whole different mindset on our team. We've always been able to score the ball, that's not the problem, but we changed our mindset on the defensive side, and we were able to showcase that tonight. The first game they lit us up from every aspect. Like we were turning the ball over unreasonably. Today we got to show the chance of our real defense, and we did a good job of that tonight.

Q. Trent, it seems like the offense has taken a big step forward, especially since that Michigan State game. What has it felt like the difference has been, even just maybe as a team as a whole?

TRENT PERRY: Coach has always just said offense is going to come. Again, it's all about defense. Michigan State is a great offensive team, great defensive team, just a great program in general. We've got to worry about our defense, and I think we just executed that tonight.

Q. Donovan, when you talk about responding, I wonder how much in this game the fact of just sort of responding, what was the difference in this one? It seemed like you guys found answers a lot in the second half. What can you say about the stick-to-itiveness of this team?



DONOVAN DENT: For sure just our attitude. We didn't ever really get down on ourselves. They went off on a run, and we responded right back. We were talking about it in the huddle, we just have to keep answering the punches. You can't go down without a fight, and they were fighting hard, so we just kept fighting back. We just never quit on the game really. It was really a test of our fight and will.

Q. Coach said unbelievable first half. Tyler goes down. Air kind of felt like it was sucked out of the building a little bit. What was the feeling amongst you guys? What did you guys want to do to respond to perform for Tyler?

TRENT PERRY: My initial reaction, I just really prayed that he was okay, and I'm glad that he's okay. Again, like I said, it's a team effort. We had guys step up. Brandon Williams had a great game, big game for us. Eric Dailey again, offensive rebounding, defensive rebounding. Just doing it all our there, both of those guys. Tremendous effort from both of them. Kudos to them.

DONOVAN DENT: Even Eric Freeny stepped in and got two offensive rebounds. With this team, it was very unfortunate that Tyler went down, but we have so much depth to where the next man can step up any time. It was big time for us.

Q. For either of you guys, what does it say about this team that last night you guys win a game with your defense playing as well as it did. Tonight your offense really steps up. To be able to win both ways on two consecutive nights, what does it say?

DONOVAN DENT: It's big time. You want to be able to win games any way you can, whether it's offense or defense, whoever you need that night. It just shows how good of a team we really are.

MICK CRONIN: Can't win the dance contest if you can only slow dance. You've got to be able to tango too.

Q. Donovan, last night you had a triple double. Tonight you had 23 points, 12 assists. It feels like you just picked up where you left off last night. How were you able to get in such a good groove. What were you telling yourself leading up to this game?

DONOVAN DENT: I really wanted to redeem myself from the first time we played. I think we all did. We didn't really show the our full selves, and we went there and got embarrassed. Coming into the game tonight, we all got fired up. Coach got us fired up in the shootaround. These are the type of games you have to win. These are the heavyweight matchups we talk about in the preseason, and

you've got to come out and perform.

Q. I wanted to ask about your defense in the first half. It seemed to really rattle Michigan State to an extent. What did you do well to really put yourself in that good of a position?

DONOVAN DENT: We were just communicating and scrambling. We were playing like our life was on the line. That's what you have to do in these type of games. We had 25 deflections in the first half. We always talk about having 40-plus deflections. We were just out there hustling and playing hard.

Q. What was the deflection total?

MICK CRONIN: 40. I think they said 25 at half. We've got really smart kids on our team. We watched film in the first half of some things we did well, some things we need to adjust at halftime.

Then Coach Savino goes over that. As I come in to talk to them, before I said anything, Trent goes, guys we'd better be ready. You know Coach Izzo is killing those guys right now. You know they're going to come out in the second half and give us everything. They played great in the second half.

Q. Will you rest Tyler no matter what the evaluation is?

MICK CRONIN: It would take literally a miracle for him to play tomorrow, meaning that I would let him play. Right now I'm just -- you know, I don't want to speculate, trying to stay positive that he's got some sort of sprain, you know, for him. But it would take a modern miracle for him to play tomorrow.

Q. I just was curious, you kind of ramped up the three-guard usage with Trent, Donovan, and Skyy. What does that lineup give you?

MICK CRONIN: Hard to guard. I will say this to you, my friend, when you play small, you have to be hard to guard because you get destroyed on the backboard. 23-6 second chance points. So you must make up for it with shot making and play making because you're smaller. Especially against a program like that. Especially with Tyler out.

Book fouled out, and we're playing two forwards and three small guards against them. We can't block them out when we're healthy. But you have to -- if you play three small guards, you have to be really good offensively, or it doesn't work because you're not going to rebound great.

Q. It seems like throughout the season you guys have responded each and every time that adversity has arisen. You see it tonight with Bilodeau going down, Michigan State going on several runs, and like you said Trent and Skyy responding. What does it say about your team and the resiliency behind it?

MICK CRONIN: The guys didn't flinch, and I was proud of that. Offensively they were rolling, but we kept answering them. We showed a lot of poise and made big shots. Saved our shots for tonight. We didn't need them last night. Saved our shot making for tonight, made 13 3s. Which we're capable of. We're the leading 3-point shooting team in the Big Ten statistically, percentage-wise.

It all evens out. Last night we were 7 for 22. Now we're 20 for 49 in the tournament, if my numbers are right.

Q. On that, I'm wondering about in particular the drive and kick aspect of that. How does that stretch and strain Michigan State's defense there?

MICK CRONIN: Well, anybody's really. All three of those guys, they can beat you off the dribble and they're good passers. So when they help, they find the open man and shoot it in.

We had obviously very short prep for this game. So thanks to my friend Gary DeCesare, we were over at De La Salle this afternoon going through some stuff on how we're going to have to score on them. They're hard to screen because he's such a great coach, they're so physical. I think spacing is paramount when you play Michigan State because it's so hard to screen them because they just fight so hard.

Q. Mick, what's your concern level about Tyler going beyond tomorrow and into the NCAA?

MICK CRONIN: My concern is for him, for him. If I didn't have bad luck, I'd have no luck at all, my friend, since I've been at UCLA with injuries. It could have cost us the National Championship. We lost two NBA players in March three years ago.

My concern is for him and his career and how it affects his teammates. Because I don't base my career off wins and losses. Legacy is the most overrated thing in life, Jeff Van Gundy. I'm worried about impact on my players. That's teaching them basketball and teaching them how to be a better man.

Q. What are you thinking --

MICK CRONIN: I know nothing about his injury, my friend. I'm a little bit busy. They're taking him somewhere to get imaging. I don't know how long that will take.

Q. I'm wondering the second half, the way your team was able to respond to the Michigan State push, how do you get guys to sort of respond and find winning plays in those moments? It feels like this time of year those are magnified.

MICK CRONIN: Players win games. Like you were talking about the effectiveness, somebody -- about the spread offense. You still got to beat your man and kick it and find the open man at the right time, and you've got to make a shot. That's players.

Trent, Skyy, Eric, and obviously Donny, they were great. Those guys played great. You're not winning high level games if guys don't perform. You're trying to get guys, coach them all year to get them to perform at the right time at the highest level.

I give them guys all the credit because those are big time plays off the dribble, scoring and finding the open man, and banging in shots. When Michigan State's crowd is roaring, they're making shots. Those guys -- it's easy to make them when you're up 20, but when the other team is on a run and you silence them, which we did a lot. Those guys did. Big time players.

Q. Trent obviously had the big free throws tonight, big rebounds in the last game, big shots in both. What's he just meant in general, just his confidence as this team gets closer?

MICK CRONIN: Trent did the same thing at the foul line to lead Harvard-Westlake to the state title. I watched every game, I saw him play a lot, guys. I don't know if I've ever seen him miss a pressure free throw. I'd have to ask Dave Rebibo, but I know that's how they closed out Salesian in his senior year up north.

Literally, we were just talking about how we were going to play defense. He's not going to miss. Donny is like, are we going to foul if we're up three? I said, well, we're going to be up four. Trent's at the line. Then he walked away to shoot, and I told Donny, we're going to foul at half-court.

In all seriousness, I've never seen him miss a big free throw, and I saw him play a lot of high school games.

Q. After the Michigan State regular season game, you changed your lineup, and it's worked really well. What was the genesis of that? When you reflect back on that decision.

MICK CRONIN: Getting Skyy back to health. That lineup was coming before Skyy tore his hamstring. I mean, it was coming, getting our best five players on the floor because Trent was growing every day and his confidence was growing. So that lineup, it was -- I just couldn't go to it until we got Skyy back.

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