

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 14, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

UCLA Bruins
Mick Cronin
Trent Perry
Eric Dailey Jr.

Postgame Press Conference

Purdue - 73, UCLA - 66

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by UCLA head coach Mick Cronin, along with student-athletes Trent Perry and Eric Dailey Jr.

MICK CRONIN: Extremely proud of my team, down two great players, but we've got other great players. They came up with a valiant, valiant effort today. Couldn't be more proud of them.

Obviously Trent played 40, Eric plays 34. We came back, took a lead. Honestly what went through the back of my head was how are we going to play tomorrow? We're running out of bodies.

Before you ask, Donny's got a calf strain. They were going to talk to me at halftime. I said no need to play. Next week's more important.

Like I said, guys stepped up on our team. Valiant, valiant effort by some kids that hadn't played a lot -- Brandon Williams, Steve Jamerson, Eric Freeny. Those three guys in particular off the bench probably didn't play a combined 10 minutes against Purdue last time we played them. Like I said, just really proud of my guys.

Q. I don't know if the word is connectedness, but you guys seem to have found something where no matter who's on the court, you guys are all kind of in rhythm together, playing together, finding a way. How much is that going to help you going forward the rest of the way here?

ERIC DAILEY JR.: Definitely. That's what we've been looking for as a team, just finding that gelling together.



We've definitely been coming together as a team late down the stretch of the season. We just need to keep this momentum going into next week.

Q. For either of you guys that want to answer, obviously you guys are competitors, you want to see yourselves win on the court and a loss never feels good, but you've been playing some of your best basketball all season. How in your mind do you separate the two of wanting to get better after a loss but also knowing you're playing your best basketball, what's the mentality there?

TRENT PERRY: Even coming after a loss, as Coach said, we fought hard. Steven Jamerson, Eric Freeny, Williams, all those guys that came off the bench, it's going to be key for them, especially coming into March Madness, with whatever we've got to face. I'm just very proud of our guys at the end of the day.

Q. Trent and Eric, when Donny goes out, obviously he's been such a big part of this team, especially of late, what's the mindset for you guys going forward from that point?

TRENT PERRY: Just next man up. We had Skyy out early in the season, early in Big Ten play, and at the end of the day, it's next man up. We have a lot great players on this team, and everybody's capable, and I feel like a lot of people showed that tonight.

ERIC DAILEY JR.: Like he said, next man up. Everybody's got to play hard and play for their team.

Q. We saw this a couple years ago going into the tournament. Obviously when Jaylen went down. Is communication with the tournament selection people important to help your kind of standing from all that stuff?

MICK CRONIN: Yeah, it's not as complicated with this. Tyler could have played. Donny could have played. They'd have been playing hurt. But there's this -- no point -- I wouldn't have played them in a regular season game. I



just tried to take care of guys.

The experience that Steve and Brandon and Eric Freeny got today -- and Book played a lot more minutes -- can really help us next week when those guys are back. Obviously we didn't achieve victory, and with all due respect to the Big Ten, you can see how hard our guys are trying to win, but our guys are well aware, because they practice under 11 banners that say National Championship every day. They warm up under another banner with 19 Final Fours on it. We don't even have one with conference championships because there's 36 or something or so many.

So next week is what it's about for us.

Q. Are you almost rooting for a Friday game more than anything right now? Just that extra day, and how much would that mean?

MICK CRONIN: Look, I think, if you play on the weekend and you've got to fly back to the West Coast, like we have to, and we can't get out till the morning, so we won't get home until Sunday. You would hope that we don't play till Friday.

No, I'm not going to throw Matt under the bus, but he told me something that makes me confident that we'll play Friday, Coach Painter, who's a very smart guy. So I'm going to hope he's right.

Q. Can you share that?

MICK CRONIN: I don't want to jinx it. Put it this way, he just thought logistically that we would definitely play Friday. I don't know if that's about teams that play on the weekend. I don't know where he got that because at Cincinnati I was always playing on Sunday in the American Conference Championship, and we played on Thursday a lot. But Matt's smart, so I'm hoping he's right.

Q. Purdue obviously out rebounded you guys by 11 in this game. Not having Tyler, I'm sure, made an impact in that. Xavier Booker obviously gave you some size. What did you see out of him in terms of --

MICK CRONIN: He only hit one rebound.

Q. What did you see out of the rest of the guys?

MICK CRONIN: I love Book, but he's got to rebound the ball. I love him. He gave us some good offense today. Defense and rebounding, he's got to improve. Steve Jamerson played -- him and Book played 40 minutes at center, and they had a combined one rebound. Steve had

one. I'm sorry, yeah. Steve had one. Book had one. So they had a combined two. That's why we got out.

Their five man had 14, Cluff, and when he was out, Jacobsen was in, but he didn't get any. The 5 spot was 14-2. Everything else was a wash. There lies the issue.

Q. What were you hoping to find out about your team this week, and what did you learn?

MICK CRONIN: Well, you are assuming that I was hoping to find out -- I'm with them every day. I already know. So I wasn't hoping to find anything out. I'm not sure what you're -- you're assuming that I was hoping to find out something with your question. I never said I was hoping to find out anything. I'm hoping to find out what time we're leaving and if I can get into a good restaurant tonight.

Q. Did you learn anything about your team?

MICK CRONIN: Not really, no. No. I was happy with the way they competed. I've been telling you -- have you been with us all year? Halfway. You jumped in, right?

Q. Started March 1st.

MICK CRONIN: Okay. We've got talent. We just haven't always had our mind on defense, which is very rare for teams that I coach, and we got great guys.

Since March 1st or whenever the heck we played Nebraska, it's been pretty -- it's been a noted change in our team. We've just got to keep it up, and we've got to get some rebounds out of the 5 spot. To do what we try to do -- now, you guys are going to think that I'm crazy, but we're at UCLA. No matter who we take the floor against in the NCAA Tournament, we're going to run out there, and we're going to be the ones wearing the baby blue and the four letters. So we believe in ourselves.

Q. Kind of the same question I asked Trent and Eric, it does feel like there's a connectedness with this group right now.

MICK CRONIN: Great word, by the way. Is that a media word?

Q. I got to give credit. I think David Woods might have come up with that. I've got to give him credit. It's a good word.

MICK CRONIN: Connectedness? Is that in the dictionary? I'm going to check that with my sister, another Northwestern grad.

Q. It seems to fit, though. What do you like about the way these guys are kind of fighting for each other because you can kind of feel it out there.

MICK CRONIN: We're playing harder on defense, man. I'm not going to drop any fancy words on you Northwestern people. We're just playing harder on defense.

We don't -- Skyy's an elite -- I'm going to drop one on you, he's an adroit defender, probably our only one. The other ones, it's just trying to -- it's demanded of them at all times and them to demand it of themselves. That's what's changed. That's what you're seeing.

Q. You called on Xavier and Steve to give you more today, and you said a couple days kind of. What did you make of their contributions today?

MICK CRONIN: Again, they had seven baskets, so they got 17 points, but you can't get one rebound out of your center position, especially when you're playing Purdue, who's a great rebounding team, one of the best in the country. That was the difference in the game.

Again, you didn't have to go to Northwestern to know that we lost by seven, and we're minus seven in second chance points.

Q. He does go to Northwestern, by the way?

MICK CRONIN: Really? I don't know what to do with all you guys. My sister's out there somewhere.

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