

# Maui Jim's Maui Invitational

Wednesday, November 24, 2021

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

## Wisconsin Badgers

## Greg Gard

## Tyler Wahl

## Johnny Davis

### Postgame Press Conference



Wisconsin - 61, Saint Mary's - 55.

GREG GARD: Obviously extremely happy with this. Tremendous program, tremendous team in Saint Mary's. I have great respect for Randy Bennett, always have. I think two programs that kind of mirror each other in terms of what they value.

But the grit and the resilience that this group has developed and grown and the chemistry that they have shown, the togetherness, couldn't be more proud of them. I've said it before in the previous couple days. I think we are watching this group grow up right in front of our eyes and that's the neat part about coaching is just take a group of young guys coming from all different places and watching them come together and have fun doing it.

So really proud of them. I will say this is a good early season accomplishment, but as I mentioned to them in the locker room, this is only the beginning. We still got a long ways to go.

**Q. You guys had some moments in this tournament down early to Texas A&M or Houston coming back late, trailing by double digits in the second half of this game. Can you talk about the resolve and the way you guys were able to believe in yourselves throughout this tournament?**

TYLER WAHL: Something about this group, you've seen it from the first day of practice, is we compete. So when things gets close, like you said, Houston coming back or down 17 to Texas A&M, we compete and we fight hard like the entire game, all 40 minutes.

JOHNNY DAVIS: Yeah. It's not easy to come down against really good teams like that, but a lot of times when stuff like that happens you want to point the finger at other people or the refs or other teammates, but we didn't do any

of that. We stayed together and came out with the W.

**Q. Johnny, Coach Bennett called you one of the best defensive players in college basketball. Can you talk about your personal defensive improvement and then comment on that?**

JOHNNY DAVIS: It's all about a mindset. Just got to want it. You got to want to stop somebody and move your feet. I learned from this guy a lot too. I think he's honestly a better defender than I am.

**Q. Tyler, early in the career you were taking fade-away jumpers in that spot or taking key free throws down the stretch there that you had to make. What is just the work you put into your game to have confidence and step up in those situations?**

TYLER WAHL: Like you said, just putting in the work in the summertime. My teammates believe in me, and my confidence grows when these guys believe in me, and I believe in myself, and it's just a great team win today.

**Q. It felt like the offense took a minute to get settled. When do you think that it kind of clicked and how important was that down the stretch?**

TYLER WAHL: I would say our defense turned into our offense. We couldn't really get anything going and then we were able to get some key stops down the middle of the stretch of the second half and that kind of turned up our offense.

JOHNNY DAVIS: I thought at the start we were playing a little bit too much one-on-one basketball. But one we started to swing it, playing our game instead of their game, that's when we really started to get it rolling.

**Q. Can you speak to Lorne Bowman off the bench today?**

GREG GARD: Yeah. I thought he -- obviously he knocked down the three. He got to the basket. I thought he got fouled on the other one when he got cut. But, no, I thought he really came in and gave us a boost and got us going, jump-started us a little bit. Tyler mentioned our defense

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was able to kind of hold the fort, so to speak. Three games in three days isn't easy and I noticed a little bit of that, but I think our depth at the end of the day prevailed and obviously Bowman was a part of that.

**Q. Why is this coming together for everybody, the team and yourself?**

GREG GARD: I think it's a commitment from the guys in the locker room. I've mentioned many times that I like what I saw last spring when we returned from the NCAA tournament after I gave them some time off. I liked what I saw this summer. I thought, personally, I've been doing this for a couple years, that we had some really good pieces, but most importantly we had a collective togetherness about us that it was going to take some time, and we still have a long ways to go, but there was a lot of things that we have to get better at. This competition isn't going to go backwards in terms of who we're going to have to play.

But just the grit and the resilience, that's always a great starting point. When your guys play hard, you can live with mistakes. But just the grit and the resolve that this group has, I've saw that from the beginning, because of their work ethic and how connected they wanted to be. And they want to be a good team.

They want to be a good team. We have a pretty good tradition at Wisconsin and this group wants to maintain that and keep pushing that.

**Q. Johnny and Tyler kept you in, got you ahead in today's game and kept you in Houston's game. Can you talk about what they're doing, especially in towards the end of the game, that really makes them so good?**

GREG GARD: They're making baskets. That's one thing. I think the thing for Tyler, specifically, him going from being a sophomore and kind of waiting in the wings, so to speak, even though he started the last half of last year for me, but him stepping into a leadership and the forefront as being an underclassman has been big for him, just his mental confidence and believing or convincing himself that he's to be in that position.

I think the other big thing for Tyler was when Johnny didn't play last week against Providence. Even though we lost the game, Tyler had to step in and really do a lot of things and did them well. I think that was the most minutes he had played in his career, maybe the most he had scored, and I think that gave him a boost of confidence and I made sure to point that out to him and to the team, that this is, I don't want to call it his coming out party, but that was big

for him I think in just a boost of confidence.

Johnny obviously is a special talent. He can impact the game in so many ways. He did it for us last year. I should have played him even more last year. But I think he's also gotten better. That's what players do in our program. They get better. He got bigger and stronger in the off-season. He's more explosive. He does a better job making decisions. He's a better finisher than he was a year ago. And he's still scratching the surface. He's, there's a lot of things that he can add to his game and improve his game.

But I think the biggest thing that this group has is just how I watched them come together and enjoy, they enjoy the game. They enjoy being with each other. They enjoy being a part of this program, and they're all about the right things.

**Q. You touched on it there, but what you saw from Johnny in the last three days, at this point has been a jumping off point to, I imagine being more dialed in. How much more can you expand with minutes and role, how can you grow him more?**

GREG GARD: Yeah, I think experience is a great teacher. So he can -- there's a lot of things he can get better at, in addition to getting physically stronger. I think there's ball handling, shooting, everything. His concentration level's better as a sophomore. He doesn't take, he doesn't get lost defensively like maybe he did as a freshman, and that's to be expected with experience.

I think it's still, it's a process, it's one day at a time. We get back to practice on Sunday and if there's something I don't like, they will know it. So this is just a beginning, this is not or nowhere near where we need to be, we got to get better as a team.

**Q. Can you touch on some of the intangible things that you've seen from Steven Crowl?**

GREG GARD: I think he's gotten better, specifically we saw a lot of teams that ran ball screens, Texas A&M, all three was predominantly a lot of ball screens we had to cover and he got the highest diet of that. I watched him get better at it and I think that combination of him, even though he got in foul trouble, Chris Vogt got in foul trouble again today, Ben Carlson gave us some good minutes there too. So it's a learning process specifically for Ben and for Steve, because it's the first time they have had this high of an amount of possessions in games coming at them in these type of pressure moments.

So just learning and growing and getting better and he know that's -- the nice thing about all those guys is they

know they got to get better. They know they don't have all the answers. Steve was asking, How do I -- we changed some ball screen coverage at halftime and we talked about that and he's always asking, How do I get better and how can I do a better job for our team? And that's what you appreciate as a coach that they're consumed with how they can help their team, not consumed with themselves.

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