

# Asheville Championship

Sunday, November 14, 2021

Asheville, North Carolina, USA

## Minnesota Golden Gophers

Harrah's Cherokee Center

### Coach Ben Johnson

Press Conference



Minnesota - 87, Princeton - 80

THE MODERATOR: We have coach Ben Johnson here.

BEN JOHNSON: First off, hats off to Princeton. You know, Mitch does a great job. That's an NCAA tournament team. That's what I told our guys before the game, that I wanted to get in this tournament to get a Western Kentucky and to get a Princeton to see what we have and what we're made of. So for us it was great to go head-to-head with well-coached, physical -- like I said, that's an NCAA tournament team.

I thought our guys battled. I didn't think they broke. This is probably the third game in a row where they could have at different stretches and were able to stay poised and maintain their confidence. When you have kind of crazy turnovers or you have bunnies at the run that don't go, it's easy to have your confidence shaken, and I thought our guys didn't, and they kept their resolve, and they kept their fight, and they stayed aggressive, and they pulled it out.

**Q. Coach, third game down the stretch where they had to make plays this time with the double overtime. Can you tell your guys anything in that scenario? Are they just going to have to dig deep and pull it out themselves?**

BEN JOHNSON: I told our guys to get -- before this tournament and the beginning of the year we're going to be in a lot of games like this. That's just how it's going to go for us. The biggest thing is that when adversity hits, you know, what are you made of? We talk about that every day because it's going to hit in one way or the other.

I think our guys are embracing the grit. They're embracing the grind. They're embracing the mental toughness that it takes to win a championship, to win a game, and that's kind of become our identity. As a coach that's a pretty cool thing to see.

**Q. Free-throws, you know, you probably work on that**

**maybe a little bit more, but when it comes to those games that come down to the wire, sometimes you get tight at the line, and obviously in the second overtime, you start hitting some of those, and maybe that was part of the difference.**

BEN JOHNSON: Honestly, I don't think it was tight. I think that's when we became tired, and that's when we allowed ourselves to get tired. That was the only point where you really saw it. There was a couple of finishes we probably should have had and a couple of careless turnovers, but I thought at the line we gave into fatigue, and obviously, we're a good shooting team, period. We're a good shooting free-throw team. I don't think you'll see that again. I know our guys will get in the gym and get that right.

But, again, despite all that, to see them staying in and battle was impressive.

**Q. Payton is a guy that decided to come back again with Eric, and Eric fouled out, but Payton, it seems like he was just carrying your guys as much as he could out there, and then as tired as he was.**

BEN JOHNSON: Payton is a warrior. He is a warrior. He kind of sets the tone. He is one of our captains, and he wanted it. I think you look at Payton. You look at Luke Loewe, the job that that kid did defensively, we don't even come close to winning that game the way he guarded Llewellyn. Shoot, we recruited him here at Minnesota. He is a hell of a player. The way Luke guarded him for 43 minutes, it's like you got to be kidding me. That kid is tough as nails.

Jamison got a double-double. Sean Sutherlin came in and provided that spark, that aggressiveness, got downhill, lived in the paint. It was a total team effort. The definition of team effort in my opinion.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you so much, Coach. Congratulations. Safe travels back to Minneapolis. Payton Willis and Jamison Battle joining us shortly.

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