

# Indiana University Basketball Media Conference

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## Mike Woodson

### Press Conference



**Q. How do you feel The Bahamas was important for you as a coach and the players?**

MIKE WOODSON: Well, seeing that this is my first go around at the college level, it was huge for me. The fact we gathered some new players on our ballclub, it was great for them to get with the guys that decided to stay onboard and bond.

It gave my staff and I an opportunity to work for two months prior to us taking the team to The Bahamas. I needed that. I thought our staff, my staff, we needed it as well because, again, we were all new working with one another as well.

I thought the trip was pretty successful. I really didn't care if we won, but it was nice that we won. I just wanted to make sure that these guys, the two months that we'd put work in on the floor, they attained something that we were doing that was positive.

I thought the carryover to The Bahamas was great on both ends of the floor. Then just to see our guys for four, five days bond and hang out and mingle and kind of get to know each other, that was kind of nice to see, as well.

**Q. Getting to play a couple games was important, practices as well. Do you feel that at least gives you a pretty good head start as you head in now?**

MIKE WOODSON: I think so. Our guys kind of picked up a lot of things that I was throwing at 'em. That was for me very enlightening. It was very nice to see. You just don't know. When you take over a ballclub and up start throwing things at 'em, you don't know how quickly they can pick it up. Our guys did that.

The carryover from the time we left Bloomington to The Bahamas was nice. It gave us a nice little jump on most teams that didn't get that opportunity to do what we did.

I'm as a coach sitting here today pleased where we are but knowing we got a long way to go.

**Q. You're going to start with five of your first games mid-major schools. Is that more of a philosophy of being a first year in this program, a rebuild, or is this something in the future you might go for bigger schools? Did you want to play some closed scrimmages to get a test of nearby schools?**

MIKE WOODSON: We do have a couple of scrimmages with Cincinnati, then we have a team we're going to scrimmage up in Louisville, Kentucky.

But, again, I don't care who we play. I mean, I want to get this team back on top to the point where we want to be playing the Kentuckys and UCLAs and Kansases, big games. We got St. John's, Syracuse this year. They're considered big-time schools and big-time programs.

I mean, the schedule is what it is, man. We got to take 'em one game at a time. I've always felt as a coach if you're not prepared, you don't come to work, anybody can beat you.

It doesn't matter who we play. Our schedule is already set. It's what it is. We just going to try to take it one game at a time and see where we are.

**Q. You mentioned there's some areas where you feel like you're further along, some areas where there is a long way to go. Where do you feel you made the biggest strides? Where do you feel you have the furthest way to go?**

MIKE WOODSON: When I took over, I expected the defense to be ahead of the offense. I've always coached that way, where I put the defense ahead of the offense because I know defense, if you get a solid foundation, everybody buys in, you give yourself a chance to win ballgames.

Our defense was ahead of schedule I thought by the time we landed in The Bahamas and started to play. Offensively we still have a ways to go. I haven't put in a lot of things. I put some of our early offensive things in, some pick'n roll plays. I got a number of set offenses that we got to put in here in the next month before we open up in

November, the 9th. We still got a lot of work to put in, though.

But defensively I thought we were ahead of the schedule. We just got to get more sharper and fine-tuned on the offensive end I think.

**Q. What have you asked Trayce to do this off-season? How would you rate his progress as a perimeter shooter thus far?**

MIKE WOODSON: Well, again, we've had quite a few scrimmages leading into the trip to The Bahamas. He's taken some jump shots, but not a lot. The way we play him, puts him in the post, puts him in pick'n rolls where he can pop or roll, kind of his choice. He's made a few jump shots.

Asked the other day in scrimmage, I got on him about not setting screens. The red team was down three. I was so mad at that time. I said, Hell, I'm going to draw the play up for him to shoot the three. He popped out and he shot it and he made it. I didn't let the game go, force the overtime. I blew the whistle and said practice was over with, everybody in.

I drew it up. I don't know if most coaches would have done that in that situation. I just wanted to see how he would respond. He made the shot. So I know he can make 10-, 15-foot jump shots if he just shoots 'em. I'm going to keep putting him in situations and forcing his hands to take the shot if he has it.

I mean, he's making his free throws, which is kind of nice to see, too. He's made a nice jump I think from the time we started and where we are today. I thought he played extremely well in The Bahamas.

**Q. The point guard position, where you are right now, what are your thoughts? What are you going to be looking for in camp in terms of players and minutes?**

MIKE WOODSON: Again, we got three point guards in Christian, Xavier and Rob. They all been battling. Christian is starting to step up now, where he was a little behind the eight ball. I thought Xavier and Rob were kind of leading the way, which I expected.

All three have been playing well. I thought Xavier in the game in The Bahamas, the first game he got in foul trouble early, so that kind of put him behind a little bit. But the second game he stepped it up and he played like we thought he was capable of playing and leading our ballclub.

I feel good about our point guard play. All three got to

score the ball I think for us to be effective. I'm pushing all three in that direction to do that, so...

**Q. You talked about the improvements made. You were ahead of the game on defense. Offense was behind a little bit. Defense is usually harder to get a team to come together on. Why do you think they were able to come together easier? How much further do you have to go where you'd like them to be on offense?**

MIKE WOODSON: Defensively I'm a demanding coach. When you don't do it right, I keep making you do it until you do it right. We've kind of assembled a nice defensive system that they kind of understand. Early on I wouldn't let 'em switch anything, just held 'em accountable for guarding their own guy. I thought that helped us.

When we got to The Bahamas, we switched some in the first game, then we switched a little bit more in the second game. I thought we were even more effective.

At the end of the day, like I said earlier, I've always coached the defensive side of the ball first because I know if we can build a good foundation defensively we'll put ourselves in position every game to be in a game and possibly win the game.

**Q. What have you liked so far from both the tangible and intangible from Miller Kopp?**

MIKE WOODSON: I know we were recruiting him. We recruited him to come here to make shots. But I want more. He's got to defend some, too. He hadn't been used to switching or getting called in mismatches where he has to defend. He's going to be held accountable because I've always told players throughout the course of a ballgame, You're going to guard someone differently than the guy you started with. That's just the nature of playing basketball.

I try to put our players, along with my staff, in the best position possible to be successful defensively and feel good about it. I keep raving, but I'm happy with our defense, but I know we still have a long way to go in terms of the progress of our ballclub.

We hadn't been together that long. I'm not making any excuses because, again, at the end of the day we've shown good signs from The Bahamas trip, from the scrimmages we had prior to us leaving to go to The Bahamas. It's something to build on and keep pushing.

**Q. Back to point guard play. Especially with the experience you have there, how much freedom do you allow those guys, letting them take charge on the floor**

**depending what they see, are reacting to, saying you trust them to put you in the right place?**

MIKE WOODSON: I've given all three of those guys freedom to play. I've given everybody freedom to play. I've never been a coach that kind of locks a guy in a box and say, Hey, you stay in the box, this is the only area you can play in.

I think everybody that's been in a uniform this season so far has had the freedom to play. I think any coach would want a point guard, or two or three, that can just run his team, where I can sit back and don't have to say a damn thing.

That's not the case right now. Till they actually know me and learn what I'm about, I don't have Jason Kidd and Palou Prigioni and Raymond Felton, guys like that, that I think were great point guards.

But I do have adequate point guards that I think can do the job. I just got to put them in the best position possible to be successful to help us win.

**Q. As you enter practice, do you have a starting five in mind? Competition could change that, but what is your first five or do you have a first five?**

MIKE WOODSON: Again, I'm not going to sit here today and tell you what my first five is. I got my thoughts on who I think should start, but that can change. We started out in The Bahamas Parker and Miller and big fella and Race and Xavier. Those were the five that we started with.

I thought they played well, but, hell, our second unit played well, too. They came in and played extremely well. Rob was a part of the first game because Xavier got in foul trouble, like I said earlier. He had to come in and relieve Xavier. He played well.

My whole thing is, guys, I want 10 guys ready to play. That's going to be important for me. I got to instill confidence in all 10. If I got to go beyond that, those guys got to feel good about their chances to play when they step out on the floor.

I don't promise minutes to anybody. I told them that when I took the job. You got to earn it. But, dammit, if it's three minutes you play, you better make the most of it because I might not come back that way.

**Q. To the extent that you know at this point, if you don't, what is your team's vaccination rate? Has that been a point of emphasis? I don't know if there's basketball rules announced on forfeits. Has**

**vaccinations been a point of emphasis for you guys this fall?**

MIKE WOODSON: No, I think we in a good place as far as the vaccine. Everybody's taking 'em. We had to have 'em when we left to go to The Bahamas. We got checked prior to coming back here to the States.

I think we're in a good place as far as that's concerned.

**Q. What kind of reception have you gotten from fans in the streets since you've been here? What have they responded to things you said?**

MIKE WOODSON: Everything has been positive. I wouldn't expect anything differently. Man, listen, my life has been spent here. You guys seem to think, hey, I've been away for 40 years. Quietly I've been here every year. You guys just didn't know it.

My walk of life around town, my wife's walk around town has been great, man. I mean, people are excited. I'm excited. I came back here for one reason and one reason only: to put this team back on top. I know there's a lot of work that's got to be done. I'm not new to this.

I feel good about where I am and where I sit today. Bloomington and the people around town has had a lot to do with that.

**Q. When you're teaching, how much does Coach Knight's name come up, stories, concepts, this is how he taught it?**

MIKE WOODSON: It comes up off and on. But I tell you what comes up more than anything, is the banners that hang in both arenas, practice arena and here right next door. That's what comes up.

Shit, every time we step out on the floor, before we break huddle, I tell team look at those Big Ten titles, look at the national titles. There's history here, man. We're not here just to play, man. To me there's always been a lot at stake here even when I played here.

Yes, that's Coach Knight hanging in the rafters, that's all they need to know. I got to push 'em in that direction to make sure that they understand we're playing to win a Big Ten and a national title, nothing else, man.

It's no good thinking any other way.

**Q. How many guys do you feel confident in that can make threes for you? Do you have a ballpark on what percentage you need to shoot from distance to really**

## **be as successful as you want to be this year?**

MIKE WOODSON: Well, again, I mean, everybody is shooting the three ball, as you know. That was one of the concerns for us going into The Bahamas and defensively stopping the team that we played in The Bahamas from shooting threes because that's what they were really good at.

I thought we shot the three ball very adequately, being our first trip out. We going to have to shoot high 30s I think to 40s to be really effective I think offensively.

Miller can make 'em. I got guys that have shown in practice they can make 'em. We were shooting a lot of them in practice. We drilling it a lot as far as our free throws, as well. Only time will tell, man.

I mean, we can't live by -- you got to have a mixture. The beauty about our team is we do have a nice couple of low post guys, three as a matter of fact with Race, Trayce and big Mike that can demand the ball inside some. We're going to have to play some inside-out.

But guys got to be ready to step up and shoot it when they're open. I'm not taking that away from 'em.

## **Q. Can you talk a little bit about your coaching staff, how you gelled throughout this process, what Coach Matta has brought to the table for you?**

MIKE WOODSON: Coach Matta sits in a lot of our meetings every day. But I look at Ya and Kenya, Armond Hill, who has been around me a long time, Dane. Those guys are new. I've been in this situation before when I formed a team in Atlanta. It was the same way in New York.

We got to get to know each other. They got to know what I'm about. Sometimes I'm not easy, but I try to keep it fun. For guys that have dreams of being a head coach, I'll never hold that back in terms of my approach. My job is to enhance it and help them. If they think that I can coach and help them, then that's great, too.

But we've been spending time together just bonding and talking basketball. I lean on Matta because he's gone through it. He's been in the trenches.

As an NBA head coach, I don't give a shit what level you coach at - no, really - I got the utmost respect for coaches, man, because coaching is hard. Until you've sat in that seat, you have no idea what it's about.

It's been a nice work relationship. If you ask those guys,

they think it's a reality show because I try to keep it upbeat. When it's time to work, it's time to work.

## **Q. I want to take you back to this summer. You had a reunion. You stood up and were kind of the face of the program. What did that mean to you? Did the weight of that whole event have a heavy bearing on you?**

MIKE WOODSON: It kind of touched home, man. I mean, after sitting up here accepting the job and going through a few months of work on the job, I mean, it just hadn't set in.

When all the players came back that we brought back, I believe it was about 150 players, it kind of touched home, man. A lot of those guys have paved the way way before I was even thought of. Some of the younger guys after me probably looked at me as a guy who paved the way for them. It was one big family reunion, man.

To see everybody back and see the main man who made it all happen sit there and then get up and speak that night, it was perfect. Those kind of settings we can't stop. That's just the beginning of who I am and what I'm about because I think ex-players have to be a part of this ride as well because they were a big part of it when they played here.

## **Q. Obviously you've been a head coach in the pros, assistant coach in the pros. When you took this job, college coaching is a little bit different, what has been the hardest thing for you to change? Do you still coach the same way you did the way you coached with the Knicks and Atlanta?**

MIKE WOODSON: I can't change, man. I mean, the only thing that changes is the name and the uniforms. I just feel like all players want to be coached. You got to be able to touch 'em, pat 'em, but you got to be able to challenge 'em, man, push 'em. Especially young players. I've learnt that from the time I coached in Atlanta. Young players, they truly think they play hard. To me there's always another level, then there's another level. When you get to that peak, man, where you playing hard all the time, things come easy for you from a basketball standpoint.

That's the beauty of coaching in terms of trying to get players at that level because when you do, you win. That's normally what happens.

There hasn't been any surprises. I mean, I've got a good group of guys that we've assembled. That's the nice surprise. Everybody seems to like one another. Everybody comes to work. It makes working, coming to work for me, a treat, man.

I don't know. I don't know if that answers your question.



But there was no surprises. I mean, coaching is coaching, man. We just got to get players to buy in, work their asses off, do what's asked of them.

**Q. Race Thompson played most of the year with his back to the basket last year. What is the difference for him in terms of what he's going to be asked to do this year and how has he taken to that role?**

MIKE WOODSON: Let me just say this. When I took the job, some of the coaches that were here, you know, I'm a great listener, I like to pick my coaches. I ask about Race. Some of the coaches, Well, he can't handle the ball that well. You probably don't want him handling it. Can't shoot out on the floor. You probably don't want him.

I just squashed all of that because I don't believe that. As a coach, I feel like I can take a player, like Race, who everybody said can't make threes, can't bring the ball up the floor and make plays. Well, it's my job, your job as a coach on my staff, to get him to do that. That's what we do as coaches. I think that's the biggest challenge.

My coaches, when I sat with them, they were like, This dude's different. I am different because I think out of the box. I want players to think out of the box. I don't want to pigeonhole you and say, You can't do this and do that.

To answer your question, with Race and Trayce, even Trayce, he's handling the ball even more. Till they prove me wrong, I can always scale back. But Race has got to be able to make shots out on the floor and feel good about it, shooting the ball.

I thought in The Bahamas he took a few threes, I think he made one or two out there. He's made them in the scrimmage. He's made basketball plays in the open court handling the basketball, things that the coaches thought he could never do.

Again, that's a sign of work and trust and putting him in the best position possible to be able to do that.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much.

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