

Indiana University Basketball Media Conference

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Coach Mike Woodson

Press Conference



Q. Just curious when you go back and watch film of the Syracuse game and the turnover situation, obviously not what you want. Is there any theme that you've noticed when you evaluate these turnovers? Is there anything specifically you're trying to stress to the guys going into the next game to get those numbers down?

MIKE WOODSON: Well, again, I thought most of the turnovers were really unforced. I mean, they were within the zone, and we were trying to make passes that weren't there. I mean, things that we can clean up.

I think we were trying to make like the right pass, but it's the next pass. I mean, they cover up so quickly that it's the skip pass or -- it ain't the pass where we kind of talk about buddy ball, where our bigs play together outside of our zone, and then when they draw defenders, they kick the ball out.

I mean, most of the turnovers came from Race and Trayce, trying to make plays out of the zone or to each other or they lost it. These are things that can be cleaned up, but I thought that was the difference in the ballgame, the turnovers and the fact that we gave too many dare shots where we're right there and not hoping that they miss, we've got to make them miss. That's kind of how I look at it.

I thought that was the difference in them winning the ballgame the other night.

Q. Not just Syracuse but all season so far, it seems like you guys have allowed some big runs in games and you've also gone on big runs in games. How much of that do you attribute to just basketball, or is there something specific about this team that you're trying to clean up in terms of like mental focus and things like that?

MIKE WOODSON: Well again, I'm not using that as an excuse. This team hasn't been together that long. You're going to have ups and downs like that until you -- I don't

know how many games it's going to take. I hope it's not long. We've had games where we've sustained it over a 40-minute period, and then we've had games where we've had slippage. That's a part of basketball. It happens.

The two games that we did have the slippage, we made the plays down the stretch coming home to secure the win. That's what I look at.

You're going to have some close games. You're not going to blow everybody out that you play. From a coaching standpoint, I'm just trying to find out who's going to make plays when it gets tight.

I'm still learning our players. They're still learning me. They're still learning each other. It's just work in progress right now.

Q. With Trayce Jackson-Davis, is he playing at the level of a Big Ten Player of the Year candidate, and what has impressed you most about his play the past two games?

MIKE WOODSON: Well again, I mean, I think he's been -- when I first got the job and I started zooming in on how he played last year, I just thought he didn't play with the fire that he's playing with now. There were possessions that he took off a lot of times last year.

So when I put the tape together and I showed him the things that I thought he could be better, the areas where he could be better in, he's picked up in those areas. He's really making an assertive effort when somebody be off the dribble, that he's there to try to challenge shots.

He's starting to use his right hand more now around the rim, which he rarely used a lot last year. When he did, he wasn't -- he didn't complete the play. He hadn't shot a lot of jump shots.

Again, the way we play, there's times he's playing out on the floor and he's taken a few this year but not a lot. Teams when they play zone or they trap him, it's hard for him to make jump shots. I mean, again, I like where we're playing him right now because he is playing at a high level



and he's making plays around the rim where he should be making plays.

He's trying to lead, man. That's, I think, a big part. Here's a young man that's just his second year, and he's trying to be a leader. That's nice to see because if he's the best player on the team, he's got to lead, and he's doing a great job, I think, in that area.

Q. The second part of the question was now that Rob Phinisee is back, all four of your point guards are healthy. We've seen Khristian Lander have some good stretches. How are you going to handle all those point guards with minutes moving forward?

MIKE WOODSON: Well, you know, that's a tough one. Rob is not 100 percent healthy, but he is back, and he gives us veteranship.

I thought coming down the stretch the other night with -- and it's no knock against Tamar and Khristian, Khristian makes a big shot, but we don't get into the play. With 10 seconds on the clock, the play that I drew up, we don't even get a shot off. Again, we went blank there.

You know, at the end of the day the answer to your question, Rob will still be the guy that comes in off the bench first because he's got the experience. Really based on how he's playing will determine what we do with Khristian.

It's hard to play three point guards, especially when you've got Tamar Bates and Anthony, who I think deserves to play a little now, too. He hasn't played much. At least he gives you toughness and he can make shots, so I've got to figure out how to get him in the game some, too.

It's a lot of moving pieces, but that's my job. I've got to try to figure it out.

Q. With conference play coming up and obviously with the close game against Syracuse, do you think the energy in practice has ramped up? You guys were rocking the suits the first couple games. Any reason why going dressed casual against Syracuse? A couple people want to know.

MIKE WOODSON: Well, we changed up -- I thought going on the road, we allow the players -- the players were dressed and were in suits, which were very professional. We all flew in together looking alike, coaches and players with the same outfits on, and we just decided to go casual on the road. The players wear suits when they enter the building while being on the road, and I thought they looked very professional, too, coming in.

It was no big thing. It's just that's how we're going to do it on the road, and at home we'll look a little bit more professional.

Q. And then about the practice ramping up, the energy --

MIKE WOODSON: Well, we hadn't really been -- the games were coming so fast that we haven't had a chance to really have long big practices that we've become accustomed to having.

I thought yesterday we had a long practice, we had a long film session where we looked at some of the Syracuse things, and then we started prepping and getting ready for Nebraska. Then we went to the court and had a long night. Today we'll kind of scale back a little bit and try to prepare a little bit more for Nebraska tomorrow.

Q. I was going to ask about defense, how you feel like you guys are defending. Obviously you guys were defending at a high level early in the season. Where do you feel like defense is now?

MIKE WOODSON: Well, we still, if you look at our numbers, guys, defensively we're still playing pretty good defense. I mean, we're guarding the three-point line well, and we're guarding the two. Teams haven't shot it that well.

Syracuse made some shots. They made some tough shots.

But again, when you've got shooters all over the court -- their starting five averaged in double figures coming into our game, and we knew they would get the bulk of the minutes. We went into that game knowing that they had guys that can make shots.

I always tell our players, you can't hope that guys are going to miss shots. You've got to make them miss shots, and we didn't do that in the game, and you compound that with the turnovers, we were lucky to even make it a close game after getting down as much as we did early on. I thought our guys fought, man, coming out after the half and got back in it and really made a hell of a -- a play here or there, we wouldn't be probably having this conversation. We'd be a lot more happy about how we came out of there with a big win.

For the most part I was pleased with our effort and play. But the turnovers and the dare shots, we've got to -- those are things that you can fix. It's not like they're not unfixable.

The turnover thing, I just don't want this thing to last -- to be lasting, because that's just not how we set out when we first got together in terms of playing offense. You've got to get shots. You can't turn the ball over.

Hopefully tomorrow will be a lot better in that area and clean up these dare shots because I thought that's what cost us the Syracuse game.

Q. Nebraska has about five guards that basically average about 73 points per -- 79 I guess it is. What do you have to do to slow down Nebraska's guard unit, and how do you think your guards have been playing up to this moment on the defensive end of the floor?

MIKE WOODSON: Well, I mean, I don't think we've played extremely well out front as of late because we've been giving up numbers to point guards and shooting guards, and that's something that we've got to get back to being better.

We talked a lot about it yesterday and did some things on the floor that I think might help us a little bit, but Nebraska, they're guard driven, in terms of their style and how they play, so we're going to have to really lock in and defend off the dribble where we're not giving straight-line drives and keeping people in front of us where we're making them make tough, contested shots. We've got to keep them from the paint.

That's going to be huge with this team going into tomorrow's game.

Q. We have Miller on later today, as well, on Zoom. Now that he's a few games in coming off that big game against Syracuse, how have you seen him settle into the first six, seven games of the season into a new team?

MIKE WOODSON: Well, he's starting to shoot the ball better. That's what we brought him here for. I think he and Parker both are starting to find their shot, which we needed -- we won some games early without those two guys even scratching the surface.

I mean, as we go into this Big Ten run, they've got to make shots. It's just -- that's why we put them in the position. They both are starters, and we brought Miller here for that reason. I thought really the last three games he's starting to find his range.

This last game he made a lot of big shots for us to keep us in the ballgame and even giving us an opportunity to win the game.

Q. Talking about the turnovers again in the Syracuse game, obviously 13 for Trayce and Race. They have to have the ball in their hands a lot, but they're not accustomed to it as much as some of the other guys. How important is it to get them to not be the course of your turnovers, but as a team you guys are averaging 13 now, and if you take away the two 25-turnover games and add the average of 13, you guys are only averaging nine a game, which is probably where you'd like to be. But the big guys seem to be turning the ball over more than the guards.

MIKE WOODSON: Well, again, I'm not going to take the ball out of their hands. When you're playing a zone offense, there are holes in the middle of a zone, and you've got to find those holes. I thought they did an excellent job. Trayce had 30 and Race had 17 points around the rim in that zone.

They've just got to realize a lot of times the double-team came down on them, and they threw the ball away. They lost balls trying to make plays after getting an offensive rebound or when it was actually thrown to them in the middle of the zone.

These are things that, hey, they've got to clean up. Like last year they wouldn't -- Race wouldn't make plays where he's trying to shoot floaters and things of that nature in the middle of the paint against a zone, and vice versa Trayce, unless it was a dunk or a drop ball pass where he could lay it in. They're trying to do things which I'm comfortable with.

When you're talking about going against the zone, yeah, you've got to have guys that can make shots on the perimeter, but you've also got to have bigs that can draw double teams once they get the ball in there to kick it out to guys to make shots.

Hey, we just didn't make a lot of -- we made a lot of good plays, but we made a lot of bad plays, too, and those two were on the end of a lot of them, and we've just got to make sure we help them clean it up so we don't go through this again.

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