

Indiana University Basketball Media Conference

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Mike Woodson

Press Conference



Q. Mike, I know this decision to end the Crossroads Classic was made before you got here, but what are your thoughts going forward on playing games in Indianapolis? I know as a player you got to every year and such, and how important is that going forward for you to get to at least try to play there at least once a year or close?

MIKE WOODSON: It's very important. I mean, that's home for me, man. That's where I grew up. Give my family an opportunity, and friends, to come out and see us play. Not that they don't come down the road, 37, to see us here in Bloomington.

For me, it's sentimental. I love Indianapolis and everything that it has to offer. It would be nice if we could get a game here in the future. I don't know how that's going to pan out. We're working on some things. So we'll just have to wait it out and see where we go after we finish this weekend.

Q. I did a couple radio interviews this week, and the number one question I kept getting asked is where is Khristian Lander in the rotation? Is he on the verge of getting more playing time? So I thought I'd toss it to you. Where is he, and is he on the verge of more playing time? Where is that dynamic at?

MIKE WOODSON: I would never discuss with any fan or media playing time. Khristian Lander is wearing an IU uniform, and if I see fit to put him in the game, I just hope that he's ready to play whatever minutes he gets. And he's done that for me.

I don't know, that's a hard question to answer because, again, as a coach, I'm going to do what I think is right for the team, and that's not to say playing him is wrong. He has played some, maybe not as much as he wants to play, and that's good too because I want 17 guys who want to play.

That's what playing basketball is all about. I'd be disappointed if he sat over there and didn't give a damn about playing.

So, hey, Khristian's just got to keep working, which he's doing that, doing all the necessary things on and off the floor, and just got to wait and see where it leads us.

Q. I'm curious, when you look at Notre Dame on film, what concerns you the most about them? Just in terms of the guard play, they obviously have a lot of guys who can make plays on the perimeter. How important is that going to be for you to match that on Saturday?

MIKE WOODSON: First of all, they're well coached. He's done a hell of a job over the years there at Notre Dame. They've got a veteran ball club that's been together a while, so their system is in place. They know each other really well. So we'll got to combat that as well.

Yeah, their perimeter play is what drives them. I think, when I watch film on them, they're very organized. I like the way they play on both ends of the floor. We got to commit ourselves for 40 minutes to come out of Bankers Life with the win. It's not going to be a game where we go in and think it's going to be easy. We've got to compete for 40 minutes and see what happens.

Q. Hey, Coach. I'm curious what you think about what you're getting out of your transition offense right now. Are you guys playing as fast as you want to play? If not, what do you want to see more of in that regard?

MIKE WOODSON: Again, everybody wants to run in basketball. I don't care what level it is. I hear that all the time. We need to run more, run more, run more. Well, you got to get stops. You got to create your chances of being able to get out in transition and run.

Yeah, you can dribble the ball up quick when it's slow time and milk possession or take quick, early shots and play fast that way. Listen, we're scoring almost 80 points a game, and we're giving up 62, 63 points a game. My thing is I look at the plus-minuses. That's a pretty good plus. Yeah, I like to get easier buckets, but the only way you get those is you've got to get stops and create turnovers where you can get out and do things early.

That might speed the process up, but I don't buy in to, well, we've got to play quicker and this and that. I just want to be more efficient. That's what's important to me.

Q. This is kind of a coaching philosophy question, but you've talked a lot about instilling confidence in your players. How do you balance instilling confidence while also like being hard on them when it's needed?

MIKE WOODSON: Hey, coaching is coaching. I tell these guys all the time, it's never going to ever be personal with me. Sometimes when I'm loud and boisterous, it's the message that you probably need to ring in on, not because I'm screaming. Listen to the message.

That's kind of how I was coached, and I'm not saying it works all the time, but I know when to pat guys and when to push guys. I've learned that as a coach over the years.

I think all players want to be coached, guys. I do. It's just finding the right buttons to push. There are days I'm sure they walk off the court saying that this guy's crazy as hell, but then there are days that they say, hey, man, Coach really is a good dude, and he loves me, and he wants nothing but the best for me. Because at the end of the day, that's what it's all about. It's nothing more than that.

I'd be foolish to think anything differently, man. I need these guys to win. I need them to play hard and do the things that I think they can do to put us in a position to win. So I don't want to screw that up. But I'm still going to coach. That's what I do. That's what I like to do. It's a balancing act, put it that way.

Q. You talked about Notre Dame being obviously a lot more perimeter oriented, especially with their big guys as well. How have your bigs, especially Trayce and Race, come along with defending out on the perimeter, and where do they still have to go to reach their full potential?

MIKE WOODSON: I think they've done a good job in that regard. We don't switch a whole lot, and when they do switch, there's some times they get caught in a bad way, and they have to switch out on a smaller guy. That's just basketball. You can't play a 40-minute game and that not happen. It can happen in transition where you didn't get back and you might have to play somebody that's smaller than what you're accustomed to playing.

That's the whole beauty, I think, about our ball club when I took over. Those are things that I try to teach. It ain't going to be perfect every time down the floor, so do you just say, well, I'll take this possession off because I'm not

guarding my man. I'll make up the next possession. It doesn't work like that. You're going to get caught in bad situations, and you're going to have to just man up and play.

I think, for the most part, they've done a pretty good job in that area. I have no complaints there.

Q. I just wanted to ask a little more about how the series with Kansas came together. You said from the beginning this is the sort of game that you wanted to play, the type of program that you wanted to play. When did you guys start putting this together? What made it a good fit in your mind? I guess just tell me more about how this came to be.

MIKE WOODSON: Well, look at both programs. Kansas has got great tradition, man, got a great coach in Bill down there. I just think fans want to see games like that. It used to be that way here. Somehow if I can get the Kentucky series back, I would love to get that back with Cal because I just think that's what fans want to see. Maybe we get a game with UCLA or somebody out west.

I think, as you build your program, you've got to put teams in play just to test your team, man, just to see what your program is about. That's important moving forward. Coach always did it, and it didn't hurt. After you did that two or three times, you had to run into the tough Big Ten. So it all goes hand in hand.

I think you've got to challenge your team as you move forward. As we're building this, we've got to challenge ourselves with big time programs, and Kansas sits right at the top.

Q. You stressed the importance of the point guard position since the beginning of the season. What do you feel like you're getting out of it at this this point, and how can you use this time in December before Big Ten play to maybe develop a little bit more before you get to the meat of the conference schedule?

MIKE WOODSON: I still think it's a work in progress with all of our point guards. Again, it's a tough position, man. I'm demanding when it comes to that. There's certain things they've got to be able to do to get us over the hump, and we're still in the learning stages, me being the head coach and our point guards being point guard players for our ball club. We've still got a ways to go in that regard.

I'm going to keep pushing X and Rob and Khristian to be better because, as they get better, we'll benefit from it as a ball club.

Q. I sort of had a question going into a neutral site game but maybe more broadly, especially in college, where you're probably dealing with arenas of different sizes, capacities. You're obviously dealing with different basketballs, like physically the basketball can be different from one place to the next. Do you do anything different, for example, with a neutral site game in terms of the way you prepare your players, the way you build out a scouting report, anything like that? Talking to the guys, whether it's about sight lines, about the court, about anything that might be different from what you do at home?

MIKE WOODSON: Not really. We just try to put them in the best position possible to win. We've had the Syracuse and Wisconsin game. The only other game we had was Belmont, where we went to Louisville and played there. Until you learn how to win and know what it's like -- that Wisconsin game would have been a beautiful win for our ball club because it would have put us in a different light, just as a team in general, I think.

They really don't know what it's like to win yet on the road although Belmont was a pretty good test because they're a pretty good team. I've just got to get them over that hump.

To answer your question, we're not doing a whole lot -- times are different. You eat differently when you're out on the road. But our preparation is still the same in terms of how we go about preparing our guys to play.

I always told our guys, even in the pros, when you go out on the road, you've got to have a totally different mentality because you don't have your fan base that's there like a sixth man that's rooting you on. So your whole makeup has got to be totally different. Once the game starts, you can't turn it over. You've got to get shots, and then you've got to get stops and rebound the ball. That all goes hand in hand every time you play, but on the road you've got to be a little bit more deliberate about how you play. You can't take chances.

I thought in the Syracuse game we got down so early that scared the hell out of me because I didn't really know how we'd respond because we hadn't been in that position. And then we did respond. Then in the Wisconsin game, losing the big lead, I think our guys know that they can compete on the road but we've got to finish it. That's the name of the game. You've got to finish to get that feel of what it's like to win on the road.

Q. I know you never had to worry about the basketball stuff from the NBA to college, but this is the wrap-up of finals week and that. How have you adjusted to dealing with the academic loads of your players and

the responsibilities of that? How much do you talk academics with them?

MIKE WOODSON: All the time. I talk to the academic counselor all the time. Basketball is basketball, I get it, but academics, education is first. It's more important than just basketball.

I think we put so much emphasis on sports in general, and I get it, but you've got to get an education around me because that's going to take you, I think, a lot further than this sport. We give them time to do what they need to do, and I work around their schedule for practice time because that's important.

Q. Just wanted to follow up on Jordan Geronimo. What do you like that he's done, and what would you say maybe are the next steps for him to continue to progress this season?

MIKE WOODSON: Just continue to work. He's gotten better. The big thing, when he's challenged defensively, be it in traffic defensively with the basketball in his hands, he's got to get more comfortable in that area because he shrinks. Those are things that will come with more time, more practice, where he's more comfortable in doing things because I'm not -- I won't ever take the ball out of his hands and say you can't do that. My job is to get you to do it.

He has made major strides from the time we started some months ago together, and he's getting better. He's a good kid, he works, but he comes to the gym. He's a proud kid, and he puts his time in. So he's just got to keep working, I guess to answer your question. My job is to push him to get better.

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