

Indiana University Basketball Media Conference

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Trayce Jackson-Davis

Press Conference



Q. Trayce, could you just take us through the process of making this decision. And how much impact did it have that you were not able to go to the predraft camp because of COVID?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: Yeah, it was -- after not being able to attend the NBA Combine, coming down with COVID, it kind of puts a damper on things that I've been working on throughout the NBA process. So I thought it was -- made the decision quite easy honestly.

Basically, not being able to attend the combine, I probably could have still done draft workouts and try to raise my stock, but I felt like this decision coming back was the right one and an easy choice.

Q. First of all, are you at your home or your parents' home?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: I'm at my parents' home.

Q. Given that there's two things at play here, right? Obviously, you want IU to be as good as possible and you came back and help them win, but you want to be as good as possible. How do you balance that, and what do you ask of Coach Woodson to make sure you can achieve both?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: The biggest thing is both obviously. I want IU to be as good as possible. I think I elevate their team a lot. Just overall in the sense of me playing away from the basket more, I think pick-and-rolls more, kind of what we did at the end of the season is going to be big, pick-and-pops, stuff like that.

Just using what I use from this NBA draft process going into next year, especially with the feedback that I got.

Q. Trayce, you talked about earlier in regards to kind of what you want to see going forward in the future. You're on the Hoosier podcast. You want to the off-season work to be changed up. You want the way practice is randomly changed up. Is that more from an

intensity standpoint to be more intense early on, or do you want a more stiff-ended approach on the skill set and things you work on?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: I think intensity-wise, we have a great team. I think everyone worked as hard as possible. Just the things we were working on, we ran a lot last year with more emphasis on defense. Having more emphasis on the offensive game plan because our defense is going to carry over from last year. We've just got to speed some of the younger guys up.

I think the biggest thing for us would probably be offensively more sets, stuff of that nature. Just trying to get meshed together more, play with different guys.

Last year we had two teams, so it was like the starting five and the bench. We would play against each other. We would never switch up the teams. That's where the starting five and the bench players would play together. I think that's huge for us to just get our team chemistry better.

Q. Trayce, you're the first big draft decision we've seen with the NIL earnings out there for a little while. Did that impact you at all? Did you set a little higher bar for the draft? Or have you seen some of your other friends that have gone through the process affected by it?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: Obviously, the NIL with all the -- like free agency is basically what it is. But with the transfer portal and all of that stuff, it didn't impact my decision. I was never looking at another school or seeing who was going to reach out and give me the most money to go there. So it was never anything like that.

I was either going to the draft or staying at IU. So I wouldn't consider the NIL to be a big reason why I stayed even though I know there's probably going to be money there and opportunity there, which I'm blessed to be in that situation. Obviously I'm going to use it to my advantage, but I'm here to play basketball, and I'll finish my degree.

Q. How and when did you tell Mike Woodson that you are going to be coming back to IU, and what was his



reaction to it?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: He was kind of surprised actually because I was the one that actually called him to host the meeting on Thursday. So I told him on Thursday. We had a long talk about, especially the off-season stuff, kind of some things I envisioned to help our team be successful because this was his first year in college basketball, so I was just waiting to see what he would do with his way.

And then taking the stuff I learned from the other two seasons under Coach Miller and incorporating some of the stuff I thought would benefit us was big, and we talked about that. I told him at the start of the meeting that I was going to come back, and he was ecstatic. He was ready to go. He was really pumped up. He's probably still smiling right now.

Q. Trayce, congratulations on making your decision and getting it out of the way. How much was that a relief in and of itself? And what are your expectations now coming back for this team for your final season?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: It was a big relief. Got people asking every day what your decision is going to be. Before I got COVID, I really wasn't even set on what I was going to do. I was just going to see what happened at the NBA Combine, try to show out there and take it from there. After getting COVID and not even having symptoms but I kept testing positive. So it just felt like it was a sign that I should return. But it was a huge relief.

Then the expectations that I have for our team, I would say the biggest thing for me is to try to win a championship. Obviously take it first with the Big Ten and then see what happens in the NCAA Tournament.

Q. I'm curious, you talked a little bit about this, but the outside shooting and wanting to expand that part of your game, is that something that you feel like you haven't been asked to do in the past and that you're comfortable doing, or is it something you're not comfortable doing previously? How do you kind of assess that, and how do you integrate that into your game moving forward when you're as dominant as you have been around the paint?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: So this is the way Coach Woodson explained it to me. He said, especially last year, I was so dominant on the low block that I really didn't need to do that. It's still going to be to a sense of where I'm still going to have dominance. I'm not going to just utterly forget about that. The biggest thing for me is adding just a few jump shots here and there to my game.

He wants me, he said I have to shoot four or five jump shots a game, and I'm still going to get 10 to 12 shots under the rim. Just adding and incorporating to it, especially in practice to start.

Q. So when you were out there in L.A., give me three or four things that you really focused on that you felt either, A, you got better at, or B, you got a lot more confident at and felt like, yeah, I can take this with me, whether it's going to the NBA or going back to IU. Like I could really take this with me and make it an impact tool.

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: I think the biggest thing, when I was out in California, I was getting trained like a guard -- ball handling, shooting, just reading movements off the dribble, catch and shoot, and it was a lot of like two-on-two, three-on-three, stuff of that nature to really help work on your outside game. So it was all of those components that are really going to help me in the future.

Q. First question. You mentioned not having symptoms. I just want to check, how are you feeling at this point? To stick with the feedback, what else did you hear? And what did you have an opportunity to -- what did you have an opportunity here as far as who did you get to talk to? What's the feedback process like if you don't go to the combine?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: It's a lot different. Obviously with the feedback from my -- the GMs, they said I was going to get drafted. They said anywhere between the beginning to late second round. Then the way that I boost my stock is to show up at the combine, show them I can shoot the ball, things of that nature. Playing on big guys and then switching out and guarding the perimeter.

I didn't get a chance to do that, so it sucks. At the same time, I'm just blessed that I don't have any COVID symptoms and it was just I was kind of asymptomatic. So that was good.

Q. I know you guys lost some guys to the transfer portal, but I think for the most part, the people that were expected to make major contributions next season are all coming back, including Race and others. Why do you think that is? Why are you and others clicking so well with Coach Woodson?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: I just think Coach Woodson was just from the beginning, the moment that he got here, he told us it was going to be a family. I think all the players took that to heart. We all hold each other accountable. We pick guys up, and he's the same way.

He's a great coach, and he does things the right way. I asked around, I asked last year, Carmelo Anthony, he told me he was his favorite coach he ever played for, and I can see why now.

Just having that and the leader of -- the head of the snake is the guy that you want, and that's Coach Woodson. He's an all around a great guy, and he has great character.

Q. Kind of following along those lines with Race coming back, Jordan, and the addition of Malik Reneau, I'm just curious about your thoughts on the potential of this frontcourt, and even Malik being a lefty and kind of a similar game to you, if he's a guy you can kind of take under your wing a little bit.

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: Absolutely. Especially with Malik, he's a great player. I watched a little bit of his film. The thing with him too, he's a winner. So that's great. Montverde is a powerhouse team. Him and Jalen coming in, they're going to make big contributions, no doubt about that. They're very mature for their grades.

I'm going to take him under my wing this summer and get to work and play with him, play against him, see how he is, and we're just going to take it from there. But I expect them to be ready to play.

Q. Trayce, I guess circling back to the question about NIL, did you even see it -- was it something that teams were bringing up? Was it something that, when you interacted with other guys going through workouts, they might be bringing up? Was it kind of in the slip stream of the predraft process for you at all even just in maybe kind of a bigger picture sort of way or no?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: Not really. I saw as much as you guys did. I just saw things on Twitter, guys getting deals, stuff of that nature. I really didn't think much of it. I mean, if they do want to go play for those places and make that money, that's on them. I'm thinking more big picture with my university and program.

The NBA has a lot of money there, so that's going to be there when it's time, but I felt like coming back to school was the right thing for me. I don't think it had that big of an impact on me. We didn't really talk about it that much.

Q. One thing I wanted to ask you with this incoming class coming in, can you just talk about what Jalen and Malik and Kaleb and C.J. and such, do you feel like this is going to be the best Indiana team you've played on? Is there any cap at all to what you guys can accomplish this year?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: Absolutely. I think this is the best team that I've been on since I've been here. It's not even the sense that -- it's the talent that we have. We have talent all across the board from the guards all the way down to the centers. We have dudes that care about the program, are here for the right things.

I think the big thing that we didn't have last year that we have this year is our team chemistry. Last year we had three guys come in and start for us that we didn't know, like we never played with them. We had to build our chemistry over the summer. Having a full year of experience with them and then adding two, three, or four freshmen in, I think it's going to be huge for us.

I think the ceiling for our team is anywhere from Big Ten Championship to National Championship, if I'm going to be honest with you. I set my standards high. We had those standards last year, but obviously it wasn't the way our season went.

I think now knowing with guys and what they do, their tendencies and what they're capable of, I think it's going to be huge for us. Now Coach Woodson has a year of college under his belt, and that's going to be big for him as well.

Q. I guess I just wanted to ask what were your conversations like with your teammates as you made this decision? What was it like getting to tell them that you were coming back and that you guys could run it back from last year?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: They were all excited. The thing was they really didn't bother me that much about my decision. Obviously, X was a big advocate on Twitter, but I talked to Race a little bit about it. But they were all like make the best decision for you. Obviously they're ecstatic I'm coming back.

That's all my guys. I haven't seen them in two months. I can't wait to go back down on campus and see them. They're excited. They're ready to go to work. I think they expect the same things that I do.

Q. Trayce, on the podcast you said something really interesting that you had mentioned to Coach Woodson that, if guys test positive for drugs, you want them out after their first strike instead of the three strike situation. Why did you feel that that was something that was important to you?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: Well, now just me being a senior, it's different. It's my last year. This is my last time

being at IU, and I don't want anything of that nature ruining our season. If you're that selfish to do that during the season, then you don't need to play for this university. I think it's plain and simple.

They've kind of been sticklers about it, but it's always giving chances and chances and chances. Being the team captain, I feel like we've had enough chances. We're mature enough to know what's right and what's wrong. That's a big thing for us. I think it's a big thing with a lot of the teams I've been on with the drugs affecting our team. So we're not having that this year. We have enough to do.

Q. Did you feel like it impacted your team last year?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: Not necessarily as much last year. I think more just getting in trouble in general. Obviously there's things that happen behind the scenes, but I'm not really going to go into that. It definitely has had effects in the past. So I'll just leave it at that.

Q. You mentioned the decision being pretty easy once you tested positive for COVID and couldn't go to the combine. Was there like a specific moment or conversation when it kind of flipped for you and you decided you definitely wanted to come back?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: I think the moment for me was when I tested negative. I tested negative on Monday, and I was going to fly out Tuesday. So I took another test Tuesday morning, and that one came back positive. So one tested negative and then positive again. I said, well, that's definitely a sign I probably should just shut it down. Then I tested again positive on Wednesday.

At that point, I was like I'm not really in game shape. I've been dormant and not been doing anything for about a week and a half, just testing positive and just being at home not being able to workout. So I wasn't in season and ready to play. I felt that, if I couldn't play in the games, there wasn't really a point for me going there.

Q. Take it back to the NIL but also involve the G-League in this, I guess. As far as like where you might have been picked or whatever, I guess was the G-League maybe less of an interesting option because of NIL? Because it was a situation where you didn't have to go somewhere to get a paycheck, that there was going to be some kind of money, did that factor in in any way? And I guess how much did you consider the possibility of a situation where you might have gotten drafted later or even be a priority sort of undrafted free agent which would lead to the likely scenario of you starting your first year in the G-League?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: Yeah, so even with the G-League, the only way -- there's players in the G-League now that are still on guaranteed contracts. So if I had to go develop in the G-League, I wouldn't mind doing that as long as I was guaranteed a contract. So that was my big thing. If I was guaranteed a contract in the second round, then I would have stayed in the Draft, but that's not what happened. I didn't think that's what was going to happen.

So I felt like coming back to school was the best option. We didn't really talk about NIL or any of those types of deals. I know the money's out there, but we're just going to play it by ear and see what happens. So it was really more of a -- it was a guaranteed contract. I could have played in the G-League. I would have been fine with that if it was for my development purposes.

Q. The word legacy is thrown around a lot, especially nowadays. When you now look at your career and you look back coming back for your last season, how do you really want to be remembered for your time at Indiana?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: I think the biggest thing for me is just obviously a player that works super hard on and off the court, set the examples, set standards high.

It's been hard for us because we haven't had a lot of success in the winning column, but I feel like now with this team it's going to be huge for us. We finally have talent, and there's actual expectations for what we can do. Just trying to get one championship under my belt, whether it be Big Ten or National. Obviously, I would want National more, but starting with the Big Ten.

I think it would be huge because I feel like we're a top three team right now there. I love having expectations and having pressure with that situation because we've never had it in the past.

Q. Just to kind of follow up on a couple of your answers there. In regards to team chemistry and such last year, you and X really the last three, four weeks of the season did a lot of great things together, but you also have talked about the leadership aspect and things about people doing stuff right. What sort of conversations have you had with him since his incident last spring and the importance of him being that senior leader as well on a team like this?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: Most definitely. I think X is going to have his head straight. He's going to be with me most of the time, me and Race. That's who he's going to hang out with, who he's going to be with. We're going to

make the right decisions. He's going to make the right decisions for us. There's not going to be any of that, no funny business going on.

Coach Woodson and him have already had those discussions. So he's ready to get started, ready to get to work for next year.

Q. Trayce, you talked about legacy was mentioned, and I know this is not why you came back, but if you have a season similar to what you had last year, you have the opportunity to end up as the third leading scorer, first in blocks, first in rebounds for Indiana. How important would that be to achieve that? But to do that, to not have a Big Ten title with that, how disappointing would it be to not have both?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: Exactly. I'm a person who would rather -- I'd rather score -- or not score 2,000 points. I'd rather get the championship. If I don't need to score that much and we're playing really well, that's what we're going to do. I'm an unselfish player. I'm a team player. But I'm going to do what my coach wants me to do.

I think I have enough talent where I don't have to score 25 points a game. I could easily score 17, 18 points and be fine, and I think we'd still win. It's just going to be what our team is like and what's working for us. I'm more set on winning the Big Ten than trying to chase records.

If we're playing the right way, I think the records will come, and I'll still be able to get them.

Q. And what would it mean to you to achieve that?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: To achieve those things, it's huge. There's only four or five players that have scored 2,000 points, and then one player or two players that have had 1,000 rebounds. Just being mentioned in that category with how good those players are, you mention names like Calbert, Steve Alford, Alan Henderson, it's crazy. Just to be even mentioned in that category is huge.

But right now I'm focused on a championship.

Q. You left out Coach Woodson. You're going to hear about that.

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: Yeah, Coach Woodson too.

Q. You also mentioned, kind of going back to that podcast, one person you want to hold you accountable in the gym, especially towards that midseason when your legs start getting tired, is Tamar Bates. Being able to work with him, you always talk about how

Tamar is a gym rat. Where do you see his ceiling this year and what he can bring to the team? Because we did see glimpses of it last year.

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: Most definitely. The big thing with Tamar, he got derailed last season with a couple of family things that happened in his corner. That's some things you can't control, and it really messes up your mentality.

I think he's back. He's got his head straight. He's ready to get to work. He's a guy that I was with all summer in the gym. He was trying to get better. As the season goes around, that mental aspect, you start to lose it a little bit, but I think this year, having one year under his belt, he's going to be able to attack that and handle that, and I'm going to be right there helping him.

Q. Defense was obviously a strength for you guys last year, but I guess how much do you think the team's offense can improve this upcoming season? I guess where specifically do you think those improvements will come from?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: I just think that at the end of the year is where our offense really started clicking, minus the last game. I think the pick-and-roll was big for us and having a spaced floor. I think that was huge for us. Then obviously the shooting, I'm going to have to be better at shooting. We're going to be in the gym all summer working on that and then just playing with each other.

A lot of guys didn't get a chance to play with certain guys last year, and I think that's going to change. We're going to mix it around a lot. We spent last year focusing on defense, and we rarely focused on offense. Just seeing what we can do and what we can achieve with actually putting more time and effort in is going to be really key for us.

Q. How much did your outlook or how much did your encouragement or enthusiasm change from the way you guys finished the season last year, the turnaround in the Michigan game and then what you did in the Big Ten Tournament? How much did that make you more enthused about coming back and taking it to another level?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: I just really think it shows. Like when you're playing well, just literally the whole state is behind you, and everyone gets excited. There's teams that I was watching when we were playing. There's teams like Michigan State. There's even other fans. I'm not going to say the name of the teams, but there were other fans cheering.

When Indiana basketball is good, college basketball is good, I'll say that. I think we have a chance to be really, really good next year.

Q. Just wanted to go back to your training out in California. There was a video that came out of you shooting and playing out on the perimeter. It's hard to tell in a quick video, but it looked like you may have tweaked your shot mechanics a little bit. Is that right? And what have you done to kind of work on your shot beyond just kind of getting shots up?

TRAYCE JACKSON-DAVIS: I wouldn't necessarily say I tweaked my shot. I think the only thing that I changed was just what the guy that I was training with in L.A. said. He said, when you catch it, always look to shoot first. I think the biggest thing for me is, when I would catch the ball, I would always wait and see what to do instead of just letting it go.

I feel like when I'm in rhythm and I'm shooting the ball without any hesitation, it's a totally different looking shot, especially when I'm shooting with confidence. That was just my natural looking shot. I didn't tweak anything about it.

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