

Indiana University Basketball Media Conference

Thursday, June 16, 2022

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Race Thompson

Press Conference



Q. Race, new guys on campus, curious how they're looking, specifically give me one or two plays that Malik Reneau has made that really impressed you so far?

RACE THOMPSON: Malik is a strong body. He already seems like he's ready to play in the Big Ten, talented big man, handle the ball, shoot the ball, and has a lot of moves in the post. He's really impressed me, especially in the past two days he's been doing really well, and I'm excited to get on the court with him.

Q. Any in particular one move that you can say, oh, man, if I was going to tell one story, it would be this play?

RACE THOMPSON: He hit like a little shimmy one-foot fadeaway that was pretty nasty that kind of turned my head a little bit. I would say that's one move that he made in practice the other day. He had a Euro step yesterday on like two people that was really nice. I've been really impressed with him.

Q. You're going into this summer with a lot of the same guys but you've got these new team members and the talent level has raised a lot. Have you seen a difference? I know it's early, but have you been able to see a clear difference between this summer and last summer where you guys are starting, the practice, the intensity, the talent level?

RACE THOMPSON: Definitely. We're already shooting the ball better than we shot it last year around this time. We have like warm-up drills where we keep track of how many makes we get, and we've already bested what we started at last year. Our first time we got like 25 and our first time last summer we got like 12 or something like that, so we doubled that on the first day.

I mean, it's just overall been very competitive. I think it's even more competitive than it was last year. We have a lot of talent, and I think it's going to be a lot of fun to just keep getting to know these guys and playing together.

Q. Race, this is now your second year with Coach Woodson and his staff. How much of a benefit do you think that will be not only this summer but into the season of just having more familiarity about what it is that they want to try to accomplish with you? Secondly, how much did that, of having a second year with them, play into your decision to come back for this 23rd year of college basketball for you?

RACE THOMPSON: I mean, that second question, I mean, just meeting with the coaches and then just having that relationship that we've built over this past year, I really trust them. I believe in them. They believe in me, and they're trying to make me the best player I can become.

That's one of the main reasons I came back. I think that if I can improve my game the way they say I can, I can go to where I have dreamed to go my whole life.

I mean, just having that second year under your belt with them, again, just keep building on that relationship, it's been a lot of fun being around them, coming to practice every day, and just talking to them, getting better with them, and then again, just continuing to push me to be a leader and they're teaching me and teaching me every single day, so it's a lot of fun to be around.

Q. You just talked about kind of what you really need to improve on obviously coming back. What are those two or three areas in your game that you're looking to take that next step to help you get to that next step in your career, wherever that may be?

RACE THOMPSON: I think it really comes down to being able to shoot the ball better and handle the ball. Then again, that's not getting away from bread and butter where I can post-up any time, but I think it really comes down to being able to shoot the ball.

I've really been working on it. They've been working with me on it a lot, showing me what I need to do, what I need to change about my shot, just little tiny things to make my shot more consistent. We've seen improvements already.



I think those are some of the main things.

Q. We asked Trayce this, but I'm curious about the NIL and how much of a factor that played into your decision to come back. I know we saw you in a commercial last year. Have there been any additional NIL opportunities for you in the off-season?

RACE THOMPSON: I mean, yeah, there's some little things, but I wouldn't say NIL was the reason I came back. It really was just about me becoming the player that I want to become, and then again, trusting in these coaches to push me to be that player. So I wouldn't say it had anything to do with me coming back, it was just about me becoming the player that I want to become.

Q. What do you want your legacy to be at IU?

RACE THOMPSON: I mean, just someone who came out and gave it all they had every time they stepped on the court. I'm not sure exactly what I want my legacy to be. Obviously I want to leave a legacy here. I think I've set a footprint. Hopefully I can make another couple footprints this coming year.

I think if I keep playing the way I can play, and I play even maybe a little bit better and improve my game as I have every year, I think that will really show what a true Hoosier is, what it's all about to be a Hoosier.

I think that's really what I want.

Q. Race, some of the staff has talked a little bit about playing Jordan more as a small forward alongside you and Trayce. What does he have to show or what does he have to do to help make that happen?

RACE THOMPSON: I think for him it's just about decision making and being able to handle the ball better. He's an elite defender. Everybody knows that. That's not an issue.

Again, I think it just really comes down to being able to handle the ball and make good decisions. He's been doing well in practice, improving every single day, and it's fun to watch him from being a person who they didn't -- nobody really handled the ball to being able to make a move, get by a defender, pump fake, one-dribble pull-up and being able to do that just in one summer is very impressive, and hopefully he can keep building on that and he can help us a lot.

Q. Just curious if you guys have seen any of the preseason stuff? I guess Andy Katz has you as a favorite to win the Big Ten next year. What's your goal as a team next season? Is that something you and

Trayce have talked about next season? What do you aspire to do as a team next season?

RACE THOMPSON: That's something we talk about every single day in practice. Our goal is to win a Big Ten Championship and a National Championship. We talked about that last year and we almost got to the Big Ten Championship in Indy. We fell short and we don't want to feel that again. We kind of got that feeling where the ball started rolling our way in the Big Ten Tournament a little bit, and that's a feeling that we want to feel all year.

I mean, that's definitely something that we talk about every day. Me personally, I don't really pay attention to the preseason. It's like June whatever day it is, so it's really early to say. No one has seen anybody play or anything. It's just a prediction. We know we've got to put the work in and go out there and perform when the lights come on.

Q. You mentioned little things on your shot. What are some things that you are working on? How are you changing your shot mechanically? Number two, when you were making this decision, what, if any, kind of pros were on the side of not coming back, of going professional? What all went into your consideration there? Was there anything telling you to go the other direction?

RACE THOMPSON: Well, the first really just shot preparation, having my hand behind the ball ready to shoot the ball when I catch it, not having to make a lot of movements with the ball when I shoot it. That's something that has helped my shot, just not go left, right, just keep it either long or short if it's a miss, and I notice that I've made a lot more shots that way.

Then again, it was just kind of like the question of I don't really know where I would go, the question of if I was to go pro, where would I be. I don't know. I felt like if I came back here I was able to keep building on what I've built the past two years of really playing real minutes, and hopefully with that, I can hopefully get some type of contract in the next year.

Q. Race, building off that a little bit, with the way the season ended, the momentum you guys had, how big of a factor did that play in your decision making to come back and kind of that unfinished business mentality a little bit?

RACE THOMPSON: Yeah, definitely. It was one of the reasons I came back. Me and Trayce and Coach Woodson, when he first got hired, he said that we were trying to change the culture around here, and I feel like last year we kind of turned the corner a little bit, and I think that

we have more corners to turn.

I think that with the people we've brought in and then the people that we kept that we can really come and do something special this coming year if all our pieces come to full. We've obviously got to play when the lights come on and everybody is going to come out to play every single night.

I think that unfinished business is definitely something that we talk about, and we kind of just made one step on that stepping-stone and we need to continue to make more steps there.

Q. Race, I know you haven't spent a lot of time with Malik Reneau yet, but I'm sure you've seen him on the court and gone up against him a little bit. What are your early impressions of him and how do you think he's going to be able to help the team this year?

RACE THOMPSON: My early impressions of him are that he's a great player. I have not seen a lot of film of him in high school. When he got here he was bigger and stronger than I had expected him to be, and he's just, like I said earlier, seems like he's already ready to play in the Big Ten. In the weight room he's strong, on the court he's strong, he's athletic, and he's skilled.

He's definitely going to be an exciting piece for us. I think he can help us out a lot.

Q. I know you said you weren't really thinking much about league projections and things, but from a personnel standpoint I think one of the reasons people are high on you guys is because you're going to remain fairly consistent from last season, you're back, Trayce is back, top three scorers back overall where a lot of other teams in the conference have a lot of questions to answer with guys that have gone out the door. How do you maximize that consistency? How do you make that work for you as a team as you move into November, December, in terms of maybe kind of putting your stamp on the league essentially?

RACE THOMPSON: I think really with me, Xavier and Trayce coming back, we've got to be leaders and we've got to show people, our teammates basically, the ropes. Kind of showing them what we did last year, how it worked for us, why it worked for us, film, things like that just really help show the younger guys what it's about because it's definitely a faster pace, it's definitely stronger guys, better players.

I think with the freshmen we brought in they're going to really be able to help us there. I just think it comes to us

three really being leaders and showing them how it's done because we've done it, and we're trying to be better so we can get those guys, everybody else kind of on board with us and really just bought into the whole program and Coach Woodson and all our other coaches, I think we can do something special.

Q. I'm curious, I saw Jordan Hulls got back to campus the other day. What has it been like having him back in the program and what kind of impact do you think he's going to have on you guys this upcoming season?

RACE THOMPSON: He's obviously a great IU player, from Bloomington, he's bonded a lot with Anthony Leal and I've bonded with Anthony, so I kind of feel where Anthony comes from and where he looks up to Jordan a little bit. I mean, he just got back, so I don't know him that well yet, but I do know that he knows how to win and what it takes to win, so I think that having him around will definitely help us out as a team, and I think he'll be a great addition for us.

Q. Race, I was wondering just about these young guys that you've gotten out, this freshman class that everybody is so hyped and excited about. As a leader, as an older player on this roster, how have you gone about mentoring them early on?

RACE THOMPSON: Just continuing to try to build relationships with them before anything. If you don't have a relationship with your teammates you don't really have anything. I'm really just continuing to get to know them, get more comfortable around them, make them more comfortable around everybody, around me, just getting everybody together, just so that we can get to know each other because if you have a team that really feels like a family, that's like the recipe for success.

Again, I think it's really just about continuing to make them feel comfortable, make them feel at home, and just making it like a big family here.

Q. Could you talk a little bit about Kaleb Banks and what you've seen from him these last couple of weeks?

RACE THOMPSON: Kaleb is a great player. Again, didn't really see him play in high school, didn't really know what to expect when he got here. He is very talented, big, big wing that can defend, can really shoot the ball, score the ball at all three levels. I think that he'll be a really fun player to watch, and he's going to be really fun to play with because he can make shots and he can make plays for his teammates. I think that we've got something special with all the freshmen coming in, even Jalen, CJ. I think that's all

of them.

But Kaleb, he's really impressed me a lot just how comfortable he is, how confident he is in himself being able to make plays, so I think he'll be a lot of fun to watch.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports