

Indiana University Basketball Media Conference

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Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Head Coach Mike Woodson

Postgame Media Conference



Indiana 90, Jackson State 51

Q. Tamar had a career high tonight. Tomorrow what did you see from him? How was he able to do that today?

MIKE WOODSON: Well, he finally had a break-out game. I'm not surprised or shocked. You know, I mean, when we started this journey with this team five months ago, he was probably one of our best players playing.

You know, tonight he kind of put it all together. Boy, made shots. I thought he defended well, and he just did a lot of good things in the short minutes that he played, the 22, 23 minutes that he played.

Q. Mike, we've asked you about this a few times. Through six games now we've seen a number of -- I guess today was an afternoon, but games like this where the bench really turned something on and found another gear, particularly in the first half. Are you really kind of seeing that group gel as a group of not just individuals that maybe can make an impact off the bench, but collectively they play well together?

MIKE WOODSON: Well, they've shown that they can play well together. In the game against Xavier, we didn't play the bench a whole lot of minutes based on, you know, the team and how the game was going.

We kind of shorted -- I shorted the rotation a little bit. Games like this you can open it up and play a lot of guys, and it gives you an opportunity to read players and see what they can do on both ends of the floor.

When we've had games like this, our bench has been phenomenal in terms of being able to do the things that we've taught them and follow the game plan. So for me from a coaching standpoint I'm not afraid to play anybody off our bench. I mean, I've felt good about that all season. I felt good about it this summer.

You know, we have a better team than we had last year,

but we still have got to prove it on the basketball floor and during the games.

Q. This summer Tamar Bates that we saw tonight, how much of that is just maybe a year older and a clearer head and just being here for year two than year one? Does all that kind of combine to get him at a more comfortable level?

MIKE WOODSON: That has a lot to do with it. He went through some -- I wouldn't call it truly personal issues. He had a baby last year, and that's a big responsibility for a young kid at his age. I thought this summer, you know, he accepted what he was going through, which he had no choice, and he started to grow up.

And these five months that we've been together after coming back, you know, he has shown some signs of maturity. We're going to need that from him because he can make shots, and he can do things from an offensive standpoint that I want him to do.

Q. How do you assess just where you guys are as a team right now defensively, and is there anything in particular, like, moving forward that you feel like you're going to have to do better on that end of the court?

MIKE WOODSON: Only time will tell, man. Xavier was the only really big team that we've faced so far. So North Carolina is a big team, and they've got wonderful perimeter players. They're well-coached. So only time will tell, man. Come Wednesday we'll see where we are.

Q. Speaking of North Carolina, how much of a challenge does it present that while they may have underperformed to this point this season, they are very battle-tested coming into this game at Assembly Hall on Wednesday?

MIKE WOODSON: Who said they underperformed? What's their record? They haven't lost a game, so I don't call that underperforming. They're doing what they're supposed to do.

You've got two teams that will probably be undefeated

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come Wednesday. Something's got to give. Only time will tell.

Q. Mike, Trayce comes back today. What's his comfort level right now, and what's your philosophy on how to manage what his comfort level is?

MIKE WOODSON: Well, he didn't play a lot of minutes today. We'll go back and assess where he is. You know, he has these next few days to get ready for Wednesday's game.

So like I told him when I broke huddle, you guys that are a little beat up, you've got to get in and get treatment and get yourselves ready for Wednesday because that's our next game.

Q. You guys built up a pretty good lead there towards the end of the first half, and then they kind of let it get away a little bit. They cut the lead down. What did you tell them at halftime because they jumped out and started of the second half with a nice surge?

MIKE WOODSON: I didn't think we finished the first half really well. The last two, three minutes I thought they had their way. And, again, you're not going to just shut teams out. They made some tough shots, but it was a lot of miscues in that last two to three minutes when I went back to the bench and brought Race and Trayce back in and Miller. We just didn't close it like I would have liked to have seen it.

But I thought coming out to start the second half hour, which we had been flat. I thought Little Rock we came out very flat in the second half, and they scored the first couple buckets against us. But tonight we came out clicking in the second half and did all the things we needed to do to stretch our lead and secure the win.

Q. Xavier Johnson is much more efficient offensively this year to start the season than he has been throughout his career. Is there anything you can point to as a reason for that?

MIKE WOODSON: Well, again, the first couple games I didn't know where X was. I thought the Xavier game he was become to old X again. He's been playing well now since the Xavier game.

I mean, I thought he had a wonderful floor game against Little Rock and then tonight he made shots and he ran our offense and got the ball where it needed to go and defended.

So I can't ask for much more than that than what he has

done. So he just has to keep it going. We need him as a senior to run our team and get us where we need to go.

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