

Indiana University Basketball Media Conference

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Mike Woodson

Press Conference



MIKE WOODSON: Morning. Happy New Year to everybody.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go to the first question.

Q. 13 days off in the middle of a basketball season is kind of unusual. What, if anything, is good about that? What about any sort of concerns you might have playing Thursday?

MIKE WOODSON: Again, I mean, it's two sides to it. If it was up to me, we would have stayed here for the Christmas holidays and practiced like the old days and continued to work. But we gave the guys three, four days off. Guys that are a little banged up, gave them an opportunity to recoup, then we came back and went to work while other teams were still playing.

I've always been one that really wants to play. We set the schedule this way. When you think about it, I mean, it's good and bad. Again, I don't like a lot of time off. I just don't. This was a nice break. Again, we were banged up a little bit, too, so it's given guys like Trayce an opportunity to kind of recoup and hopefully get ready to go starting on Thursday.

Q. I've heard you say over the last month on several occasions that you want this team to play with more toughness. What have you had to change with your practice approach or otherwise?

MIKE WOODSON: Well, again, I'm always looking to motivate and push guys to play harder. Sometimes that's got to come within, too, because I can't play for 'em.

Practices, they vary. Sometimes they awfully tough where guys are not real happy with me, then there are times when practice you just kind of breeze through it and you get through it and you get ready for the next practice.

I'm just looking at the three games that we lost. We got out-toughed in those three games, and that worries me going against really good teams.

On the flipside of that, the Xavier game and the Carolina game, we out-toughed them. I mean, that was the difference in the game.

Out of the five games, we behind one, I think. We just got to make sure when we show up on the floor to play, not only do we get off to a good start, but we maintain it throughout the game. In those three games, we just never gave ourselves a chance.

Q. The long break you had, longer than you'd ever get during an NBA season, how did you personally handle it as a coach? Did it give you a chance to do some self-scouting?

MIKE WOODSON: I went out and, yes, I did. I did a number of things. I went and honored my high school coach. I went and looked at a couple high school games. I spent all my time in Bloomington. I left for one day, and that was New Year's Eve. Went back and checked on my home in Atlanta that day. I came back New Year's morning and had practice and spent dinner with our team.

For me, I'm strictly basketball. That's what I do. I was here watching film on the computer, trying to get ready for Iowa, seeing how we can beat Iowa.

Q. With what X is going through right now in his rehab, you went through something similar your senior year at IU, how has that experience been able to help you guide him through?

MIKE WOODSON: Again, I mean, we had different injuries. I don't think anyone knows what the turnaround is for X right now. Only he will know that, strictly how his body and his foot accepts the therapy that he's putting in, the rehab to get back on the floor.

My situation was a little different because when you got doctors telling you got a 50/50 chance of ever coming back and playing, that's a little different. I was kind of backed in a corner and had no choice but to push to come back.

I know he's feeling the same way. It's his last year, his last



go-around in college basketball. He's feeling probably the pressure of getting out on the floor, and I get it. People thought I was crazy in coming back in eight weeks, but I knew my body at that particular time. Most athletes do know their body.

I'm sure X will be smart about his approach in coming back. But I wouldn't count him out, put it that way, because he's a tough competitor. Already he's doing some things probably maybe a little ahead of schedule. I'm just hoping for the best to get him back and keep him mentally positive about his approach.

Q. I'm sure you and the staff have broken down every matchup ahead of this Iowa game. How does it affect your preparation when an opponent is on a three-game losing streak like Iowa in anything you emphasize more when your opponent is going through that?

MIKE WOODSON: Listen, I've experienced it all in the NBA in terms of teams that struggle. Those are the most dangerous teams because their backs is somewhat against the wall. The fact that they're coming home, they play extremely well at home.

We had our problems with them last year. I mean, we were up 7 at halftime, and the second half we just threw the ball all over the gym. We just gave a 7-, 8-, 9-point lead with six minutes on the clock down in Indianapolis there to get to the Big Ten championship round. That wasn't good. Again, that's a game that I got to close. So those things still stick with me.

I harp on last season because that's the only thing I can really talk about based on my first go-around. You lose two buzzer-beaters, the Iowa and Rutgers game, you lose a big game in Wisconsin when you're up 20. There's about five or six games I could rattle off where we just didn't finish.

I'm trying to get 'em past that stage. The way to do that is we got to play hard. You got to show up and compete. You can't have games like Kansas and Arizona and Rutgers. You got to at least fight and put yourself in position to win a game.

Q. During the break I was speaking with another Division I coach, and he told me he has more players in counseling than he's ever had in his career, and most of it is due to social media reaction they get postgame. We're of a generation where we didn't grow up with it, we know how to dismiss it, but players today did grow up with it, and they struggle to do that. What is your approach to what players deal with when it comes to social media? What advice do you try to

impart to players who might struggle with the same thing?

MIKE WOODSON: I wish it was that easy just to tell them to leave it alone, but it's not. It's in their DNA, this is what they do. It's tough, man, because it's hurting a lot of athletes I think.

But they can't get away from it. So, yeah, you do have counseling set up for a lot of players. We deal with it with our team, as well. I won't have that fight.

I don't know how you get around it, though. Again, unless a player just stays away from social media and focus on his craft, they'll never get away from it. So you hear good things one day, and the next day it's all tumbling down on you. A lot of these cats, they just can't mentally take it. It's sad.

Social media is not going anywhere. I just got to, from a coaching standpoint, when I catch a guy that's down or he's going through some situations, man, I just hope he comes and talks to me where we can possibly get him help, and they're not out on the limb by themselves.

Q. About Trayce, it seems like he's kind of been just sort of resting through something with the break here. Do you see a difference where he's at health-wise gearing back up for Big Ten play?

MIKE WOODSON: Yesterday was really the first time he's had some contact. I thought he looked pretty good. But I won't know the extent of it until I get down there in the training room today and just see how he feels physically.

He's been doing some things on the floor, but not a lot of contact. Yesterday we had a lot of contact. Today we'll have a lot of contact. We'll scrimmage today and just kind of see where he is, providing he's feeling good about yesterday's practice.

Q. I suppose one of the good things about social media is that on Christmas morning several million people watched Anthony Leal surprise his sister by paying off her student loans with his NIL money. How much did you enjoy that yourself?

MIKE WOODSON: Well, I think it's a beautiful thing because, again, a lot of these kids, man, NIL is helping out tremendously with a lot of these families. For him to step up and do that, I don't know how much money he's made in NIL, but the fact that he's made some money and he's able to put it towards his sister's schooling, her education, is tremendous, man.

He'll be blessed for it one day. I mean, he might not see it now, but it will come back to him. You do good things like that, good things happen in a way.

I'm proud of him as a young man because he didn't have to do that. Again, she's blessed from it. The family is, too, as well. That's a big thing to step up and do something like that.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much.

MIKE WOODSON: All right, guys. Take care.

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