

Indiana University Basketball Media Conference

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Mike Woodson

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: First question.

Q. TJD is playing at a level we haven't seen before. From your viewpoint, why is he playing at this kind of level? How much growth have you seen from him in the last little while?

MIKE WOODSON: Well, I just think the maturity of him. When we started a little over a year and a half ago, I thought he was great last season on both ends of the floor.

I go back to when I took the job and I was watching him. There was just a lot of holes in his game to me, mainly from the defensive standpoint of not blocking shots, as athletic as he was, not plugging the holes from a defensive standpoint. These are things that I saw from a defensive standpoint.

Then offensively, I just thought he needed to learn how to play with more juice, more energy. I thought he did that last season.

This season, just at another level, man. He's doing things... I think we put him in position to handle the ball. I did this in the pros with guys like Al Horford, Josh Smith, 'Melo, that could rebound the ball and initiate your break offensively that gives you early strikes that way. He's really been good in that area. Been able to make plays off the bounce himself individually.

I mean, I just don't see a lot of holes in his game now. Everybody talk about he doesn't shoot jump shots. Well, shit, he does everything else. I mean, he's playing at a high level, man.

Hey, we going to need that the rest of the way because right now we're still shorthanded in terms of bigs, Logan and Race being out. It's hard to find some rest time for him.

Q. Another guy you're going to need along the way is Tamar Bates. Outside of that Michigan State game, he's been struggling of late. What is going on with

him? Heading into Northwestern, with their guards, how important is it that he's got to pick up his game quickly?

MIKE WOODSON: Well, he's played well here at home. When you go out on the road, it's just a different mentality. Somehow I got to get them to understand and help them be better, to put us in a better position to win. He has struggled on the road. Gallow has had his ups and downs on the road.

I was on 'em a couple of games ago on the road that, Hey, guys, you have to pick it up because you're a big piece to what we're doing based on the minutes you're playing out there on the road.

I got to help 'em. That's the only thing I can say to you guys because it has been a struggle for those two guys.

I think Gallow gets by because of the energy he brings from a defensive standpoint that help you, like the other night, stay in the ballgame.

Q. Have you seen a Rutgers-like attitude going into Northwestern? They're coming off of a big win over Purdue. What kind of mindset are you carrying into Wednesday?

MIKE WOODSON: It's a big-time game, man. Both teams got identical records. Statistically we pretty close in different areas offensively and defensively in the Big Ten.

They got tremendous guard play with Boo and Chase. I thought they hurt us here. Our focus has just got to be, we got to go in with a defensive mentality. They're a good offensive team and they get after you offensively. You can't get around either one of them so you're going to have to combat that with defense and rebounding, and you're going to have to be able to put the ball in the hole.

There was a lot of points scored in the game here. Our points came late when we were down early. We outplayed them in the second half. But, hell, they did what they needed to do the first half to get them the cushion where we had to scramble to get back in the game.



Hey, it's going to be a dogfight. They playing in front of their crowd, their fan base. I'm just anxious to see what we made of when we get there.

Q. Back to Trayce. He's averaged 14 rebounds a game over the last 11. His back is feeling better. Those numbers far exceed anything he's done throughout his career. When it comes to rebounding, what is fueling him right now?

MIKE WOODSON: It's maturity, man. He's learning how to do things on the floor. I've seen it with players over my career, man, in terms of they start at one place, then all of a sudden the light goes off and they end in a much better place for your ballclub. That's where he is right now. He's doing some incredible things for our team. Rebounding is a big part of it.

But I'm always harping on guys around him, the fact that in college everybody shoots a lot of threes. Those long threes create long rebounds. I tell every game going in that we can't leave it up to Trayce and just our bigs to get rebounds. We got to team rebound. Your guards got to get in there and pick up some of the scraps.

But he's been tremendous in terms of rebounding the ball.

Q. After the Michigan game, you mentioned you tightened the rotation even before you knew Race was out because you didn't want to put pressure on C.J. and Caleb. Was that because of the matchup? Do you see that tighter rotation continuing moving forward?

MIKE WOODSON: No, that's the first time I've ever used just seven players in my whole career as a head coach. I just thought at that time, a minute or two slipup, you lose the game. That's how I felt as that game was unwinding.

It's no knock against Caleb or C.J. because they've given us some positive minutes when they played this season. I elected to go that way based on my feel and where we were in the ballgame. Had nothing to do with those guys at all.

No, I don't like playing seven guys. I need to play more guys because you just never know when you really have to throw someone in, will they be ready and feel good about their play.

But, no, that's just something that happened the other day. Hopefully I can stay away from that by getting some healthy bodies back and go from there.

Q. Now that you've had a little bit of time to go back

and look at the Michigan game, those last eight possessions from Michigan, they didn't score. Not very often you see a Big Ten team at home go without scoring. What stood out from watching that about the defense, guys stepping up, grinding out a win?

MIKE WOODSON: I just think we were on par coming down the stretch. We really weren't that great offensively, neither team, to really put the ball in the hole.

I thought that five-minute stretch, defensively we were really locked in, in terms of the things they were running that we covered going into the ballgame.

I turned to Armond at about the two-minute mark, I said, Man, we need a little break and a crack, man, in order to pull this game out. We got it down the stretch. We made defensive stop after stop. Jalen made the drive to get fouled and at least give us two free throws. Even though Trayce missed his free throws on the front on the one and one, that eight- to nine-second time where we had to get the stop, normally teams get a better shot than they got. I thought our defense forced a terrible shot and we was able to secure the win.

Q. Northwestern obviously picked up a big win yesterday. What impressed you about the way they were able to slow Purdue down and the challenges they present for Wednesday?

MIKE WOODSON: Again, I thought Purdue was pretty much in control. Coming down the homestretch, man, that last six, seven minutes, that's when you have to buckle down and figure it out on both ends. Northwestern did with their defense, man. They started making shots.

I mean, it was a hell of a game. I thought Purdue was in the driver seat for a while, but Northwestern changed it with their defense.

They're a good offense. Those two guards, man, they're two of the best I think combo guards in the Big Ten. We got to combat that and we got to combat it for 40 minutes, man, because they going to play minutes until they're in foul trouble. They both played I think 38, 39 minutes last night or yesterday afternoon.

Unless we get 'em in foul trouble, we know they going to be on the basketball floor and we got to deal with it.

Q. With Miller Kopp's progression here, how he's fit into Indiana in his second season, he's going back to Northwestern for the final time in his career Wednesday night, what have you seen from his progression this year?



MIKE WOODSON: Again, I mean, he's played well for us. I mean, I go back in the NBA when you get traded from a team, you always want to go back and show 'em why you shouldn't have traded me.

He didn't play particularly well up there last season. I'm sure that's on his mind. I'm going to talk to him a little bit about just relaxing and just play, man. When it comes your way, you got shots, take 'em. Not put so much pressure on yourself to really perform and play well.

At the end of the day we're going to need a total team effort from everybody, not just Miller, to beat this team there.

Q. Maybe an odd question, but what do you think Trayce wants his legacy to be at IU? He was a very good player on a team that didn't do very much. Now he's getting an opportunity to play well and lead you to a spot competing for the Big Ten title.

MIKE WOODSON: I think it's just that alone. His legacy will be to win a Big Ten title. We're able to win the Big Ten title this year, then go on and do something special in the tournament, that would be his legacy, man, because his freshman, sophomore year, he just didn't win much, never made it to the Big Dance. Last year was a major jump for him and this program and for me being the first-time head coach coming in here.

But his legacy, man, I mean, statistically he's done everything that you can do. He's reminded me that, Hey, I'm getting ready to go past you. He know it's out there. For me it's great, records are meant to be broken.

But I think winning a Big Ten title and a national title will separate his career in terms of what he's done here, man. I mean, that's what I'm pushing for. I want nothing but the best for the kid because he's played his ass off for us.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, thank you.

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