

Indiana University Basketball Media Conference

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Mike Woodson

Press Conference



MIKE WOODSON: Good evening. Let me just say it's a tough day in Indiana basketball. When you lose a legend like Bob Knight, who meant the world to me, man, in terms of my growth, I mean, he basically shaped my whole career.

This program will truly miss an icon. It's hard to really describe in words what he meant to me, but boy, I wouldn't be sitting in this seat today if it wasn't for Bob Knight.

To his family, I wish them nothing but the best moving forward. If there's anything I can ever do, I'm going to always be here for them.

With that being said, I'll open it up for questions.

Q. Obviously with Knight there's a lot of things that were impressive. I'm curious what impressed you the most about him?

MIKE WOODSON: You know, I grew up with nothing. From a beautiful family of 12, brothers and sisters and a mom and dad, and I think what impressed me the most when he recruited me and he came to the house, he promised me that I would get an education and that I would play for the best basketball program in the country. That's all I needed to hear is somebody to give me an opportunity.

So that impressed me, sure as hell impressed my mother probably more than me because I was the only one that was able to go to college and get an education and graduate.

Q. You've talked about coaches you've worked with, coaches that have -- Cotton Fitzsimmons and Larry Brown, guys like that. In your day-to-day approach to the job, what are the things you think you take most from Coach Knight, whether it's the way he taught or some of the stuff he ran, maybe the way he carried himself?

MIKE WOODSON: It was all about his preparation. We were always prepared to play, and that's so important. You

can will yourself to win, but can you really prepare yourself to really win.

That's what he did when he was here. He prepared guys to play at a higher level than most of the teams that he played against and coached against.

I would say his preparation probably stands out more than anything because we never went into a game not knowing what the hell we were doing. We didn't win every game, but we were in a lot of games, and the games that we lost, it wasn't because we weren't prepared.

Q. How do you bring what he did and his accomplishments and his legacy moving forward to the current generation of players? Do you talk about it, show clips? How do you incorporate that because you're dealing with a generation that didn't get to see your teams play. I'm curious how you move that forward and teach that.

MIKE WOODSON: Well, I haven't changed a whole lot in terms of how I coach. You know, I've been some, I give some and I take some. I think coaching is coaching, and I truly believe -- I've always believed this, all players want to be coached. It's just finding the right buttons to coach them. That's what Knight was so great at doing.

Yeah, he lost some players along the way that couldn't take it or struggled with the way he coached, and they moved on. But for the most part, the guys that played for him here and stuck around, they enjoyed playing for him because he got the most out of them.

I'm going to continue to push guys and make sure that they do all the things necessary on the court as well as off the court. That's how I learned. I think I've turned out just fine in that regard.

That's something he instilled in me when I played here, and while I'm coaching this Indiana team, I'm going to do the same thing.

Q. At a previous job, I covered Royce Waltman, who was an assistant here right after you stopped playing,



and we would talk on occasion off the record, and one day I asked him about Coach Knight and why he was so loyal to him, and Royce said something, though I'm not quoting it directly, you had to be here to understand it. You were here. You understand it. Where does the magnetism of that loyalty among his ex-players, his ex-coaches, when does that start, and how has it fed itself through your own life experiences since?

MIKE WOODSON: No, it started from the time he recruited me. He held true to everything he said he would offer me. Sure, I didn't win a national title, but I won a Big Ten title, a gold medal with him, an NIT championship with him. So I was in the trenches with him.

That meant more to me than anything because he believed in me. As a coach, I believed in him. He was one of the best coaches out there. He was winning national titles.

It's hard to really describe it unless you've gone through it, but if I had to do it over again, I'd do it the same way. I really would, because it really shaped me as a person. It really did.

Q. Through both your actions and your words, ever since you took this job, you've emphasized bridging the gap between that era of Indiana basketball and the one that you lead now. You've had him back at practice, he spoke to the team before. What was that like to have him back at the practices and speaking to a team that you're leading when he was speaking to you guys?

MIKE WOODSON: I just wish he was more healthier when he was going through being back here because what better person to sit next to and chop it up and talk basketball than Bob Knight. I'm new to this college game. Boy, if he was right, man, it would have been unbelievable to sit next to him and he help me navigate through the waters of college basketball because he was so brilliant. His mind was just phenomenal in terms of his thought and his process in terms of beating his opponent.

He was always two steps ahead of everybody. I always thought that as a coach with him. He saw things that as players we didn't see. Most great coaches are like that.

That part of it, being back, I think about that all the time because I can still sit and talk to Larry Brown and some of the guys that I've worked with, but I couldn't do that with Coach Knight because his health wasn't there.

Q. What do you tell your current team about when you played for Coach Knight that you maybe hope that

sticks with them or that they take into their lives?

MIKE WOODSON: That they can always count on me, me being there. That's important. After all the things Coach and I went through over the four years, I went on to play 11 years, and he was there every year. Would come see me play here and there.

As a coach, he was always there as a coach. I could lean on him. Hell, he was the reason why I got my first coaching job, because he had to make a phone call for me to an owner, and he made that call, and the next day I was hired. First-time assistant in the NBA.

I would hope my players can respect me enough after they're done playing for me that they can reach back and call me and say, hey, Mike, can you help me if I need it. That's more important to me than anything, and making sure that they're doing all the things necessary while they're here with me on and off the court. That's what I went through.

Q. We talked about his preparation and how deep he would get into that and have players ready and I've heard players say the games were much easier than the practices. But during the games his genius would also come out because there are always times where things don't go the way you expected them to go, but he was able to see things that a lot of people couldn't see. What did you learn? What did you see? What are some of the examples of that?

MIKE WOODSON: Well, I mean, it's hard to describe it unless you're there on the floor and you're playing the game and going through it.

I think one game that truly stands out is over in Puerto Rico playing for the gold medal, and that meant so much to Coach because of all the turmoil that surrounded that gold medal.

I remember playing Puerto Rico, and we were up, I think, 13 with about four or five on the clock, thought we could really coast out and win the gold medal, and they made a hell of a run to cut our lead to three. I was the captain of that team, and I remember him calling a time-out, and he grabbed me by my jersey, and he pulled me into his face, and from the viewers' eyes, you guys probably thought, hey, he's up to no good. He pulled me, and he said, Woody, don't let us lose the gold medal.

We went back out and went on a 9-0 run to bring the gold medal home.

It's just the little things. He could have not pulled me in and

just said, hey, come on, let's go win this thing. But he came to the main source, and that was me, being the captain. The fact that he pulled me in never once entered my mind. It was what he said.

It registered. We got the job done, won the gold medal and came home.

Q. Obviously we all found out the news yesterday evening. I'm just wondering when and how did you hear the news and just what's the last day been like for you since you heard the news?

MIKE WOODSON: Well, we had practice. After practice, I went in to steam and shower and Tim McGraw came in and told me that he had passed. It's tough. I mean, it's tough.

Next question, please.

Q. You've mentioned that story several times about Knight making the call to get you your first coaching job. What do you think it was that garnered that respect from people that weren't his players or weren't his assistant coaches?

MIKE WOODSON: When you go through the grind with him, the respect factor is so high. We respected each other both ways, based on what I went through the four years that I was here.

It never wavered all those years, so I wouldn't have expected anything else. I knew I could pick that phone up and he'd make that call for me. He never would have told me no. That's just the respect factor and the friendship and the brotherhood that we had all those years.

I mean, it was special. It's hard to describe it, guys, but boy, it was special.

Q. February of 2020 when everybody was back here together for that game against Purdue, when all those former players and you guys all got one more chance to be around Coach that day, what now still stands out from that afternoon, that evening, that weekend for you about sharing that time together?

MIKE WOODSON: It was like old times. You think back when he coached here, we had a reunion every summer where we got together for a weekend and just chopped it up, played golf, and got a chance to talk to guys that you hadn't seen in a while. This was every year.

That was like a reunion bringing him back, and we needed to bring him back. He needed to be back here, man. This

is Bob Knight's house; make no mistake about it. So he had to be back.

I thought all the players that turned out and the fan support that we got that night for him, it was unbelievable. Hoosier Nation is going to miss him because as far as I'm concerned, he's the greatest coach that ever graced the college basketball floor.

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