

# Indiana University Basketball Media Conference

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## Coach Mike Woodson

### Press Conference



**Q. With Xavier Johnson, what are the two or three key things that you look for for him to have a consistent, productive season at the level that he can?**

COACH WOODSON: Just play like he did the last game, was pretty good. There's going to be nights that he has big scoring nights, but I thought he did a good job in getting us in our sets, defensively, up the floor, applying pressure.

I think he had six assists the other night. So he slowed down a little bit the other night and got guys in position where he could make plays and get guys the ball when he needed it.

Again, there's going to be nights where he might be the guy that has a hot night. But I just need him to lead. That's what point guards should do, and make sure guys are doing what they're supposed to do.

**Q. Following up on X. I know you said you're always tougher on point guards, always demanded a lot of him just for that position. How have you seen him navigate preparing for this season when maybe there are fewer of those experienced voices around a year ago? I know he's a captain. Probably had to go through his own personal journey of coming through the injury and sort of getting realigned for a sixth year. How have you seen him approach not just the idea of point guard but the idea of captain, of leader, of sort of locker room presence ahead of this season?**

COACH WOODSON: There's no doubt he's grown. I think the injury had a lot to do with it because it humbles you. When you get hurt and don't know what direction you're going to go and how quickly you can get back on the floor to play, it humbles you, and it's an eye-opener. And he basically hadn't really played since, I think, what was it, six, seven games in last season.

So the fact that he put the work in to get back mentally, I think he's in a better place to lead. That's why I made him the captain. And having that title, it bears a lot of responsibilities. And there's nothing wrong with that. It's

just are you willing to accept it and do all the necessary things on and off the court to help this team win because that's what it's all about.

**Q. In the exhibitions, we saw Reneau and Ware both make 3-pointers, how important is it to this team? Have you seen enough in the fall to expect that they can consistently do that?**

COACH WOODSON: Only time will tell. You can't predict what teams do. I coached a New York team that had all 3-point shooters and they were all great over their careers and knocking them down. So I knew what I was going to get. You have no idea what you're going to get yet. Only time will tell.

**Q. What does it do to an offense when you have guys like Kel'el Ware and Malik Reneau, who are bigs and usually playing in the paint area but they can step out and hit the 3 and have to be respected to do that? What does that give your offense as far as a variety and what does it do to force defenses to adjust?**

COACH WOODSON: It's a bonus because, again, all the years that I coached in the pros, AL Horford was the only guy that could step up make a 17, 18-foot shot. And as his career went along, he extended his shot to be able to consistently make 3s when he shot them.

He's the only center that I've had -- I take Amar'e Stoudemire could step out and make it up to 18 to 20 feet. Beyond that, he just never really shot 'em. But he was never around long enough, healthy enough to see them in a full season.

So this is new again for me because these two guys can stretch it to the 3-point line. But, again, I'm not one of those coaches that consistently want my bigs -- if they're open and got a good look, yeah, I'm not opposed to them taking that shot and knocking it down.

But, you know, bigs supposed to play inside, too. I don't want them thinking they've got to live on just shooting 3-point shots because for me that's not the way the game should be played.



**Q. You have a freshman guard in Gabe Cupps. Have you seen enough of him through the summer and exhibition games to know you can go ahead and trust him with some quality minutes as we rolling through some big games?**

COACH WOODSON: No doubt he's going to play quality minutes. He's proven that. That's the reason why we recruited him. He just does all the little things that you're supposed to do.

Now, he's going to have his ups and downs based on matchups and things of that nature, but he's a tough competitor. Sometimes toughness gets you through it. So I'm very pleased with his progress and hope that he just continues to grow and learn the college game because he's got a long way to go.

**Q. Going off that theme but really talking more about the entire second unit. How often do you see your starters ramping up minutes and how big of a portion of the minutes do you still see your second unit getting as you get more into the regular season?**

COACH WOODSON: I just like the way we've been playing here of late, and it's kind of how I put it together, and the second unit, they're going to play.

I mean, I feel good about our second unit, but they're going to have to produce. I'm playing the guys that's going to produce and play. And they've shown it and earned my respect in terms of earning minutes, and they're going to play. And if they're playing well, they'll be in here a while. If they're not, then we have to juggle and try to find guys that are playing well together to help us win. That's what team is all about.

**Q. With all the fresh faces you had this year, I'm just wondering what you feel like you learned about your team against UND and last Friday as well?**

COACH WOODSON: Again, I'm still learning. We've got a long way to go, guys, that was just two exhibition games. You learn more as the season goes on.

My thing is we've done a lot of good things in those two exhibition games based on all the things that we've thrown at these guys.

And the fact that they've picked up what we've given them is promising. But again, only time will tell. We've got a long way to go in terms of our schedule and the teams that we play, and it starts tomorrow night. Florida Gulf Coast is a good basketball team. So we've got to come ready to

compete and put in a 40-minute ball game.

**Q. Following up on that, coming out of those exhibition games, what is something that you think really will have to improve as the actual regular season starts tomorrow?**

COACH WOODSON: Well, again, we are not really familiar yet with our defensive rotations the backside of our defense. That is something that we've got to get better. And we've got to rebound the ball better.

That's huge in a defensive possession. We play a good defensive possession and then we don't block out somebody ball watching. And the guy comes in and keeps it, keeps it alive for their team.

So there are a number of things. Offensively our execution in the half court game has got to improve. So, I mean, we've just got to keep working at it because that's the only way you can fix it is practice and continue to work and get familiar with what we're trying to get done and rehearse it over and over and over and over again until you get it right.

**Q. I know Jakai Newton was somebody you were really excited when you were able to sign him tough go of things with the injury situation, how is he doing? How will it be determined whether or not what the path forward is for him? And with a young guy like that, going through an injury situation, how do you keep him engaged in practice and keep his spirits high when he's obviously going through some tough times with the injury?**

COACH WOODSON: Early on he was struggling because he was hurt and he just didn't feel like he was a part of it. But he's kind of grown past that now because he's starting to move around a little bit. He ran a little bit on the treadmill. He's been able to come out and walk through and hasn't done a whole lot of the walk-through stuff but the stretching and the warm-up stuff prior to us actually getting going on the court.

He's been a part of that. So, I mean, I think he's moving in the right direction. How quickly he comes back, only time will tell. And then we've got to make a decision on what we're going to do with him; is he healthy enough to play when he comes back? If not, then you might have to think about redshirting and things of that nature. We haven't even talked about that. But, I mean, that's on the back burner if that may occur.

So we've just got to let nature take its course. He's got to just continue to work and rehab like he's been doing because I brought him in, just like Cupps, because I truly

like his toughness and the things he can do on both ends of the floor, and we just haven't been able to get him out there to give him an opportunity to showcase it.

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