

# Indiana University Basketball Media Conference

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Bloomington, Indiana, USA

## Mike Woodson

### Press Conference



**Q. Is there any update on Kel'el Ware's status for this weekend's game, and did he practice at all this week?**

MIKE WOODSON: He was on the floor a little yesterday. He did some warmup drills with us. Nothing where he's had contact where he had -- has to cut and -- and block out and block shots, things of that nature, no. He just basically did some endurance stuff on the floor with us during our warm up. So I'll get a better feel today once we get down there and see where he is today.

**Q. Given how important Xavier has kind of been to your team since you got here, and we have seen him play at a really high level, I know he struggled in, I think, five of the six games since he's been back. But this week he's had off, have you seen maybe some improvement from him in terms of what he's able to do on the floor, and just maybe is there anything you can do from a mindset perspective to try to help him get back to being that effective player that we saw at earlier times?**

MIKE WOODSON: Well, you know, I totally agree with you there. You know, we've got to get him back. You know, you go around the Big Ten and you look at all the teams, you know, the perimeter play, the point guards are really playing extremely well.

And you know, X, make no mistake about it, in the first year, you know, us making it to the Tournament along with Trayce and that supporting cast, X had a lot to do with that. And you know, since his injuries, you know, he's been up and down, man. He's been soul searching trying to find himself.

I know I'm frustrated and not in a bad way, meaning for him, because you know, it's -- this is his last go-around, man. He doesn't get an opportunity to come back to college and play basketball again. What he's gone through really the last year and a half has been tough.

So you know, he's had a few good days of practice, and you know, I'm just -- I'm just going to keep encouraging

him, and -- and hopefully we'll get the old X back because we're going to need him as we continue this journey throughout the Big Ten.

**Q. You talked about just X, and I guess the term you used is "soul searching." Is that easier for an older guy? Is it more difficult when maybe he wouldn't have necessarily obviously expected some of the obstacles he's had the last year and a half with the injuries? Is it easier because he's got more experience or maturity, or is it sometimes easier in some ways with a guy that's kept having to hit and reset, when maybe he thought "this is my last this" or "this is my last," you know, I don't know, senior day, whatever?**

MIKE WOODSON: You know, even though he's been in the college game, when you haven't experienced injuries, because you know, I went through that my senior year, it's deflating, man. I mean, mentally, it crushes you.

And you know, all I can think back to, you know, what I went through to get back. You know, I was crushed because, I mean, how the hell can something like this happen your last year, and you don't even know if you're ever going to play again based on what the doctors are telling you. And you know, I don't know if his was -- his wasn't that severe, you know what I mean; he broke his foot. And then he had the problems again this year.

You know, that he's -- you know, mentally, it's been probably tough on him, man. You know, I'm the only one, along with his family and friends, can probably help him get out of this rut, man. Because he has had his ups and downs this season, and I feel his frustration, man. But we've still got a lot of Big Ten games left. There's a lot of room for him to get back on track, and you know, that's what I'm pushing -- trying to push him in the right direction to get there.

**Q. Get your thoughts on what Malik said Friday night after the game in regards to you guys just needing to get more in sync with each other going forward. What stands out to you when he says something like that, either offensively or defensively or both, as to what just needs to be better for this group to be more in**



sync?

MIKE WOODSON: Well, again, I mean, you know, we weren't expecting to go into the Wisconsin game without our big guy. And you know, having X, still trying to find his way, we are soul searching as a team.

I don't mean, make no mistake about it, we were missing, you know, 14 and 9 rebounds in the big guy, a guy that can block shots. We scored enough points. We shot the hell out of the basketball, you know, from the free throw line, from the three-point line, and shooting twos.

But our defense stunk, you know what I mean. You're not going to get -- you're not going to beat anybody giving up 91 points like that in the Big Ten. I mean, it's tough enough to win on the road. But you go out on the road with just an offensive mentality, you stand to lose. You know, you got to go out on the road with a defensive mentality and rebound the ball to keep the game intact, and I don't think we did a good job of that.

You know, that's on me. I've got to get us playing defense. I just didn't think we were defensively ready -- ready are to play. We didn't do what we're supposed to do, you know, and the miscues, and you know, the scouting report, I thought we came out with great intentions. You know, started the game out great but as the game went along, we lost our way defensively.

**Q. Kind of going back to the guard play a little bit, Friday you mentioned that you were liking what you were seeing from your front court options but you still needed to get some more from the guard play consistently. Having this week off of practice and having some chance to evaluate, have you seen the response that you've wanted from that group of guys?**

MIKE WOODSON: Well, again, only time will tell. I mean, practice is what it is. You know, we've had some tough days of practice, you know, which we should, you know what I mean. That's the only way you're going to work your way out of this.

Only time will tell. We're going to be tested at Illinois, there's no doubt about it. I watched them play last night, and it was a very competitive ballgame on both ends with both teams. I mean, it was a high-powered game, which is kind of nice to see, you know.

And so we've got to go in with the mindset, we've got to -- we've got to try to play at that same level because that team, Illinois is playing very, very well right now. They are. They lost a tough game in overtime, but they were right there ahead with a shot to win it before it went to overtime.

We've got to be ready to commit ourselves for 40 minutes.

**Q. Speaking of Illinois, you know, watching them since they got Shannon back, they seem to like to go to a smaller lineup. They have got shooters kind of in all spots. When you guys are going in with your bigger lineup, what is going to be the key to defending whatever they are trying to do offensively right now?**

MIKE WOODSON: The big challenge is that we've got to make sure we get our bigs back in transition because they are pushing every opportunity they get, and you know, it ain't -- really, it's not going to matter who is guarding who. You've just got to make sure we get the ball stopped and we've got a body on a body.

I mean, and there's going to be times, big fella might be playing, you know, one of their smaller guys. I mean, that's just the nature of how they play. And you know, we got to take advantage of, you know, our size a little bit, too, inside, and see how they play us.

So they are a different team. You know, more different than we've played any team in college basketball this season the way they play, and they basically are playing small ball with Hawkins at the five. They bring the big fella in sparingly, but that's pretty much what you going to get a dose of is small basketball.

**Q. After Louisville, I think it was, you mentioned with Mgbako, just some of the expectations that he had on him and obviously kind of started a little bit slow. I think he's scored at least ten points in 12 of the 14 that followed that Louisville game. What you do you make of his evolution as player, and also off the court, the last few months?**

MIKE WOODSON: He's been great, man. I mean, I have no complaints. He's a freshman that, you know, came in with high accolades and, you know, but AU and high school basketball is not the same as college basketball in the Big Ten. It's just not. So there's a learning curve for all these young players when they come to the next level.

You know, he had his struggles but he's continued to work and you know, we're trying to push him to play at a high level. You know, he still has a ways to go, though. I mean, from a defensive standpoint, you know, there's times out there that he's not understanding what we're doing, and he looks kind of lost and out of place.

And you know, those are things that are correctable as he continues to grow as a young player. I mean, but you know, I'm pretty pleased with his progress and where he is today. He's just got to keep working.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

**Q. Gabe Cupps has received a lot of nice praise not only from you, but most of his teammates throughout the course of this season. You know, how have you seen him progress as a player from when he stepped on campus this summer to now, and really what's the next step in his progression to not only help you guys to get you to where you need to be this year, but also moving forward in years beyond?**

MIKE WOODSON: Well, he's been steady because he's been taught the right way. You know, when you go through high school, and I am not knocking any coaches or anything like that. Some get it and some don't get it. And he got it. You know, his dad did a hell of a job with him in terms of steering him in the right direction and how to play the right way. That's why he doesn't look out of place.

There's a lot of room for growth, and the growth is he's got to be able to make shots, and he's going to be able have to have to run pick-and-rolls where he can find the spots where the ball needs to go.

Defensively, he's been fine in that regard. He picks things up, you know, fairly quickly. But you know, those are the things coming down -- as a sophomore, junior, senior, those are areas where he's got to grow more. I think eventually he will. He'll get there.

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