

Indiana University Basketball Media Conference

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Coach Mike Woodson

Press Conference



Q. Mike, when it comes to free throws you guys have done a great job creating chances to get at the line this year. I think 36th in the country, but obviously not doing a great job when you get there. I think bottom 30 in terms of percentage. When to come to the players and their reaction, what are you seeing from them? Are they pressing too much? Are they not taking it seriously enough? Somewhere in between?

MIKE WOODSON: I think they take it serious, you know, because we shoot them every day, all day in practice from the beginning to the end, middle.

It's just a mindset. I've never seen anything like it in my career. I mean, it's just a mindset that these guys got to just go up and they're free. When they give you an opportunity to go score a free bucket or a point, two points, you got to take advantage of it.

The fact that we've been able to get to the line says a lot about our offense and how we have constructed it, trying to play pretty much inside out based on our personnel, what we have. And we just got to keep working.

That's all I can say in terms of shooting them and getting these guys comfortable, man, because tomorrow they are going to be in that same position. They're going to get fouled and they got to step up and make them.

Q. Mike, with the youth you guys have and inexperience in terms of that stretch of losing three of four, two at home, do you get a sense of their psyche and trying to help them through it, being something they haven't experienced before, a lot of these kids?

MIKE WOODSON: It's tough. It's my job to help these guys navigate through it. I'm trying to stay positive and still have to coach. When you watch film with these guys and see things that are not right, you can't let it slide. You have to point it out.

Film is a teaching tool, and you hope that guys, they don't take it personal. Shouldn't take that personal. It's

coaching. All coaches do it.

So I mean, I look at our first five games. We were 4-1 and next ten we were 7-3, and the last ten we're 3-7. You figure you just added three more games to that mix, you're sitting, you know, up at the top. Not at the top, but you're above the middle going towards the top and you're in a good position.

Right now we're not there. We got six games left, and I think we got to win them all. Maybe I'm putting pressure on our guys, but that's the only way I can coach. We got to take it one game at a time and try to win them all.

Q. You've talked at length about the front court being the strength of this team this year. When you look at the rebounding numbers, I think you're tenth in offensive rebounding percentage. What maybe is not happening kind of on the glass that needs to happen, and how have you tried to address that?

MIKE WOODSON: We work on block-out drills pretty much every day. We don't send four guys to the rim because I'm a big believer -- you can send three, but trying to send four and then having balance coming back the other way from a defensive standpoint, I always thought it hurts you.

So I mean, from an offensive standpoint I think our three bigs, they just got to be more active in going to the glass. Malik especially, because he doesn't get a lot of put-backs. We don't get them as a team.

And then defensively, all five guys, I mean, we have gotten outworked. I mean, the last game, second-chance shots, 50/50 balls, you know, they were the difference.

When we're doing the right things and getting 50/50 balls and blocking out and rebounding, when we rebound with teams we're normally pretty good and put ourselves in a nice position to win.

But again, the other night it was the 50/50 balls and second-chance opportunities we gave up along with the missed free throws that cost us I thought.

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Q. Obviously you've been around this game a long time; seen a number of different teams. What's your theory on can a team become a good free throw shooting team, or is that something if it's important to you as a staff it's going to have to be emphasized in recruiting?

MIKE WOODSON: You know, I look at Mackenzie. He's probably our best free throw shooter. Gabe is not a bad free throw shooter from there. It's not real good.

And it's not like these guys got bad strokes. I mean, Malik's shot is a good shot. Big fellow, Ware, is a good shot. Gallo's shot is not tore up. None of the guys shots are tore up.

I look at it from a mental standpoint, man, I mean, you can't be scared to step up there. It's a part of basketball. Been that way from the beginning of time.

So all I can do is keep preaching. If the shots were tore up, then that's different. Then you got to work on the mechanics and do a lot of different things in that area.

But they don't have bad shots, so it's between the ears to me. We just got to get these guys comfortable in making them. It's a big part of the game. You should punish teams when they put you in that position.

Q. I think last night you said that Gabe Cupps played one of his better games in the season defending Boo Buie in Northwestern. When you look back at the season and what's next, what do you see as next steps of his development?

MIKE WOODSON: Again, he's been thrown to the wolves basically as a freshman. When I recruited Gabe the deal was everyone thought Jalen wouldn't be a one and done. That was the whole deal. You had X and you knew Gabe would come in and probably be a third point guard behind two veteran guys, Jalen being a sophomore now.

When we knew Jalen was leaving we desperately tried to find a back up point guard, starting point guard, to go along with Xavier and Gallo. So we explored, we talked to different guys, and guys went other places based on they thought that was a better fit.

So we basically came into this season hoping like hell that X didn't get hurt and Gabe would get an opportunity to learn slowly, but that hadn't been the case. He's been thrown right out there. I think he's had a good freshman season considering. He hadn't shot the ball very well, but the other night he made two threes and defensively he's

been solid from day one in trying to deal especially in the Big10 with every team's point guard is pretty damn good.

He's pretty much held his on from a defensive standpoint. I thought the other night against Boo Buie, I mean, he's been one of the hottest point guards in the league and to hold the young man to 3 for 14 shooting and some of different times down the floor where he was able to keep him in front, which has been a task for a lot of teams, I was really impressed with that.

Q. You've talked a lot about this season just the team playing well in spurts but not being able to put a full game together. Why do you think that's been the case, and what do you feel like you can do at this point of the season to get them to sustain a full 40-minute game when they have shown they can play at a high level in spurts?

MIKE WOODSON: Again, I think the best game we played to me was the Kansas game. Then we dropped the ball the last three four minutes of that game. So I mean, we have proven we can play at a high level. You know, we just -- you just got to keep working, man.

I think the reason we're dropping the ball, a lot of times it's just not used to being there. You know, I mean, the newness of our team, a lot of these guys. You know, my job is to try to put them in the best position possible, and you try to go to guys that you think can deliver.

It's a mixture of things. Not making shots, not making free throws, critical turnovers at critical times, not getting a key rebound. You know, all of that is just newness I think.

This team the last two years didn't do that a lot of times. We were able to -- if we jumped on the team we were able to sustain it and play it all the way to the end and not play in spurts like we have had to do this season. I just like to think as years go by and we continue it grow, if we're able to keep everybody together you won't have that.

But we got six games left. It starts tomorrow. This is a big game for our team in terms of really staying in the hunt and trying to move the other way versus going the other way.

Q. Mike, in 2024 you and I both turn 66 years old. Curious about how your mindset works. Do you think at all in the few minutes of off time you have as to how much longer you want to do this?

MIKE WOODSON: Well, again, I came back to try to put this team in the best position possible, and I'm going to continue to do that. I mean, I'm almost 66 but I feel good and still move around and I think I still think well in terms of

the game and I still think I can teach the game.

I don't know. There are coaches that are coaching into their 70s. You know, I don't know if that's something I'll do.

I don't know. But at this point I'll take it a day at a time, a year at a time. I'm not going anywhere any time soon, guys, I'm just not.

I'm going to continue to build this team and put it in the best position possible and see where it leads us.

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