

Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

DePaul Blue Demons

Coach Chris Holtmann

NJ Benson

Layden Blocker

Postgame Media Conference



the losses, we saw the way we were playing for the last month and a half. I would talk to my AD, DeWayne, about it a lot and say, hey, we're playing well, we're playing well. We're not able to finish games as well as we need to. Sometimes the teams were just better, but we're playing well.

Most importantly, our locker room was together. These guys deserve the credit, but that doesn't happen if you don't have Isaiah Rivera and Troy D'Amico talking and saying the right things. I can't emphasize that enough right now.

Those two guys kept us together, kept us getting better, and as we always said, listen, at DePaul we're not going to flinch in the face of adversity. We're going to have a strong backbone when tough stuff happens. These guys did that.

Q. Coach, when Georgetown went up by seven early in the second half, you come out, you hit two threes and then bludgeoned them inside with NJ. Did you go and change something, or was that just something that was part of the offense that maybe you gave them a reminder?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: The only change we made -- they made the threes off of just really good execution and plays by our players. The only thing we changed is how we attacked their zone from the first half to the second half. That was the one change that we made.

We felt like NJ had the ability to pass and also create in the middle of the zone, and I think when we were able to attack there in that stretch you're talking about, it was against their zone, and we just felt like he could do that in the middle.

Q. NJ, 18 points in 18 minutes. Can you explain what you did to get yourself ready physically but also mentally after not playing for a month?

NJ BENSON: First of all, all glory to God. Like Coach said, it was a slight chance for me to be able to even come back and play today. I'm thankful to even be in that

DePaul 71, Georgetown 67

THE MODERATOR: Statement from Coach.

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Really hard-fought win, as we expected. Georgetown team that was really going to compete. I knew obviously that's the case with all of Ed's teams. He's a phenomenal coach. I knew we would have them ready, and they popped us there to start the second half, but our guys really responded and gave ourselves a chance there.

Then when they came back, guys made big plays. Players win games. Layden's three, the execution of the tip-in with JJ were two critical plays there late. Those were two big plays to kind of stem the momentum.

So proud of our guys. It was great to have NJ back. Listen, I said this out to the TV. In an era right now where kids sometimes don't always play when they don't feel full strength, it is really refreshing to have a guy that was begging to play the last two weeks. We had to hold him back because it wasn't in his best interest. To be able to coach a kid that was dying to play even when he wasn't at full strength, it reminds me just that that resembles a good player and a guy who wants to keep getting better. I'm proud of him, and I'm happy to coach these guys.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Coach, you're coming off three straight wins, a sweep of Georgetown. You got some positive momentum. Can you explain what that means to you as you wrap up the season?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Sure. It means everything. Despite



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situation. Just while we've been off, why I haven't been practicing, Coach Matt and Coach Mac have been working me and making sure I'm staying in shape, running in practice, and just being ready to play if there was a chance for me to come back. All of that was for our seniors. This is their last run. Troy, Isaiah, and Big Skogs. We want to do something special for them.

Q. Coach, this is your first-ever win in the tournament. You talked before about --

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Thanks for reminding me.

Q. Congratulations.

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Thank you.

Q. But tell me what that means to you personally.

CHRIS HOLTMANN: It was kind of ironic. We were better in the NCAA Tournament our three years at Butler in terms of winning games than we were in this tournament, and some of that's kind of who you are seeded with. We played well in all but one game, but we just weren't able to finish. So it feels great.

I'm really happy for our guys. I'm happy that our guys get to stay together for a little while longer and as long as we can carry this momentum. I'm super happy for them.

I won NCAA Tournament games and Big Ten Tournament games, but you are really happy for your players.

Q. For Coach Holtmann, you spoke about the pressure of defense by Georgetown, and obviously expecting that from an Ed Cooley-coached team, but you have five guys that recorded multiple assists. Can you speak about the importance of having everybody share the ball and what that's going to mean going forward as far as trying to advance in the tournament?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Yeah, it's a great point. I actually didn't know we had five. That's a great point.

I thought we had some sloppy turnovers. We also had some great, great paint reads. I thought Layden's paint reads were as good as I've seen all year, and he has been getting better and better at that. I think Block's ability to get to the paint and read and create stuff was phenomenal in this game, not to mention his shooting. Just phenomenal.

A lot of guys made good paint reads, paint decisions. We really emphasized that from back in the summer. So that was rewarding.

But to your point, to have five guys that have multiple assists was really good.

Q. This question is for Layden. Early in the season I guess you were struggling, but down the stretch you've been playing with confidence, and the plays you made tonight. It was you that lobbed it to Traynor, right?

LAYDEN BLOCKER: Yeah.

Q. Expand on your confidence and the streak you're on and how you're playing.

LAYDEN BLOCKER: Like you said, the last stretch I've got a lot of confidence just getting out of my head and just playing basketball. At times I can just be thinking so much about the last play or the next play. I just don't stay in the moment.

That's something that I'm trying to work on. Even the coaches try to help me with just staying in the moment, staying next-play mentality and just play.

Q. What was your thinking on that play?

LAYDEN BLOCKER: Coach Holtmann told me to just look for JJ on the lob because at first he was running a play for a corner three, but I looked over at Holtmann. He told me what to do, and I executed it.

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Thank you, Layden. You could have just said, hey, I saw it and I made it. I appreciate that, Layden.

Q. You mentioned how much it means to you to be playing well this time of year. What are your thoughts about going into your matchup against Creighton?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Yeah, can you give me a minute? They're really good. They're really good.

We fought them last time at their place. Obviously NJ didn't play. Layden remembers that. They got us good in Game 1 at our place. Got us as good as we had gotten all year.

Greg is a phenomenal coach just like Ed is. It's going to be a tough matchup with Kalkbrenner. Bottom line, it's not just Kalkbrenner. They have a terrific team. For us we're grateful for an opportunity to come out and compete, and we can't wait to get out there and play again and wear the DePaul uniform. We're super excited about it.

Q. Coach, congratulations on the win. Can you talk



about the poise down the stretch? They pushed the tempo against you guys. Talk about the back cuts that you guys shut down and all that stuff defensively?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: We were worried them us driving them late, so we went zone, and they drove us anyway. Their ability to attack in transition was our biggest concern. They're a really fast group. Not just Peavy. The whole group is. So we kept stressing that over and over.

Really we needed great shots and great offense to be able to limit some of their transition. For the most part we did that.

Q. Chris, how did you go about managing NJ's minutes? It was a notable difference when he was off the floor, especially in that last couple of minutes. How did you and your staff kind of balance how much to play him?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: We felt like he was in good enough shape. He's been able to do non-contact conditioning for, what, a couple of weeks, NJ?

NJ BENSON: Yeah.

CHRIS HOLTMANN: For about two weeks Matt has been doing noncontact conditioning. We felt like his conditioning would be okay. We were concerned about how could he handle the physicality and getting hit. How did it feel?

NJ BENSON: It felt good (laughing).

CHRIS HOLTMANN: So I guess we're good on that front, but his conditioning was good. It was good. I didn't expect him honestly to play this much, but obviously we needed him.

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