

Big East Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

New York, New York, USA

Madison Square Garden

DePaul Blue Demons

Chris Holtmann

NJ Benson

Layden Blocker

Postgame Media Conference



Georgetown - 63, DePaul - 56

THE MODERATOR: Coach, would you like to make an opening statement?

CHRIS HOLTSMANN: I thought our effort was really good. Proud of our guys' effort. Thought it was really good. At the end of the day, the three in the corner was a tough one there in a possession game like that with just a second or two on the clock.

Give Georgetown credit. They made a few more plays. Give them credit. And I think our guys, this is a tough ending, for sure, but I love this group, I love these guys.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Not counting this game, can you take a step back and think about what transpired this year and what it means moving forward?

CHRIS HOLTSMANN: Yeah, you know, as I said to these guys in here, it's hard because the ending is so sudden. Our guys wanted to be here for the duration. But there was some real firsts that were accomplished this year and some things that hadn't been done in a long time in this program. And these two guys and the other seniors right now, when I tell you it mattered to 'em, it mattered to them that this program took a step forward. And I don't take that for granted as a head coach because it's not as common anymore. They take pride in wearing DePaul. They came into a program that was 0-20 the year before, NJ and CJ, and it mattered to 'em that they took a step forward. They're going to be remembered in a really positive way by those that -- by our great fans. I think they're going to be remembered in a positive way, as hard as this ending is.

Q. This off-season obviously you took a huge leap coming into this season. What do you look forward this off-season to tell your players to grow into next year?

CHRIS HOLTSMANN: Yeah, I think as much as anything we'll have time to really look at that. We'll look at our roster and all that goes into that. I think as much as anything, you're looking for qualities that some of these seniors had. They took ownership in the direction of the program. That's going to be a quality we look for, guys that take ownership in it.

Q. NJ, what do you hope to take away from your time at DePaul?

NJ BENSON: Just really leaving a legacy and we talked about moving the pinpoint for DePaul and the respect level, and I feel like this group and last year's group has definitely done that. I'm just very grateful and blessed to even be in a position to be on this team and play with these guys and this coaching staff. I wouldn't trade it for the world.

Q. How much did what you did the last year in the Big East tournament, when you took Creighton to double overtime, captivated a lot of the crowd, set up for what happened this year?

CHRIS HOLTSMANN: I thought our guys were, yeah, I thought -- you mean just in terms of the readiness to play?

Q. Just in terms of how you improved this year.

CHRIS HOLTSMANN: Oh, I see what you're saying. Yeah, no, that was critical for us. To have some momentum at the end of the year was critical for this group to build into a much better year. We doubled our Big East wins. Our competitive, we shrunk the competitive gap for sure, finishing sixth obviously for the first time ever. I don't know that we would have done that if we hadn't finished like we did last year if these guys hadn't done what they did towards the end of the year with some real momentum. I think that was pivotal.



Q. How do you take this game in like a big picture sense of what you guys need to use, because the same struggles that showed up tonight have kind of showed up all year. So how do you take this and move it forward as you guys take this next step?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: I think we got to just look at it and address what we need to, both in size, physicality. And we got to add some scoring to our roster and look at areas that we can improve, for sure. I think that's something that's already been in the works in the last few weeks.

Q. Two questions on Kruz McClure. First, after he hit those two big threes he didn't get any good looks. Can you tell what happened down the stretch? And then the second question, about his future, what do you think about Kruz, especially after a night like he had going into the next season?

CHRIS HOLTMANN: Well, I think he's a talented young man. Those two threes were important for us. Those were threes that came kind of within the flow of the offense, one in transition. He did a great job stepping up and knocking 'em down. I thought he had a good way about him from the start of the game, a good aggressiveness. But, you know, I give him credit. I think for Layden to play like he did in this particular game -- and give him, you know, he made critical decisions and plays with the ball in his hands in the first half that gave us real momentum. And I can't say enough about how positive that was. You look at his overall floor game, I thought it was outstanding. Seven assists. So I thought we got some really good guard play at times tonight.

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