

GEICO Players Era Men's Championship

Tuesday, November 25, 2025

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

MGM Grand Garden Arena

Rutgers Scarlet Knights Coach Steve Pikiell

Postgame Press Conference

Notre Dame 68, Rutgers 63

STEVE PIKIELL: Tough game obviously. Notre Dame, I watched yesterday, saw them live, and knew against Kansas that they've got some real tools. I thought we grew a little bit tonight. We've got to play 40 minutes. We've got to figure out the back boards.

But coming back from that kind of a deficit against a really good team shows you a little fight and shows you some character.

I knew coming in here we'd learn a lot about us. This is an elite tournament, as you guys know, with really good teams and you've got to play 40 minutes in the game. But Coach Shrewsberry is a great coach. Penn State days, what he did there and what he's going to do here at Notre Dame, so much respect for how he does things.

He's on the NCAA ethics committee, too. He does things the right way. He's a heck of a coach. A couple possessions better today, and again, we dug ourselves a hole in the first half, and it's tough way to play against a team like that with some veteran guys.

Q. Steve, were you more encouraged by what you saw in the second half or discouraged by what you saw in the first half?

STEVE PIKIELL: No, the first half, the turnovers in the first half, that really put us in a bad spot. We've got to plug that hole and then we've got to plug the rebounding, and it didn't help up both of those in the first half against a really good team that's going to take advantage of that.

Jay Mike gets a career high, plays hard, we get some awesome minutes out of Bryce Dortch and really gave us some great energy. We went with a little athleticism down the stretch, so guys are getting their feet wet in high caliber



games, and hopefully we learn from it.

But we do have to figure out this rebounding thing. This is a problem.

Q. Slow start to the first half; what was your message to the team going into the second half?

STEVE PIKIELL: You know, they ended the first half in the right way and J-Mike gets the tip-in on a Bryce Dortch steal. Gave us a little energy, but, again, we're spotting teams at halftime. Our second halves have been good, but it's 40 minutes.

I challenged them at halftime, and we keep talking about guys need to step up, and I even thought down the stretch we ransom really good plays. We executed. We just missed a couple open looks that would have kind of made it a little bit different.

But certainly the effort in the first half is how we got to play the whole game, and we've got to start understanding that.

Q. You're obviously accustomed to some really good freshmen. Notre Dame this year has Jalen Haralson. Talk about him and how he might be difficult to guard.

STEVE PIKIELL: He's just a matchup problem, and boy, he's eager to get to the rim. He's got some size and some ability to go downhill and attack. He's unique, and then when they surround it with guys that can shoot the basketball, that even makes it hard.

But they like to get in the paint, and both guys, Burton and he, and when they get in the paint, they cause trouble and they get you in foul trouble. But elite driver is how I would categorize him as and just a hard matchup.

Q. You talked about Jamichael Davis' career high. Seems to be all over the court, whether it's diving after balls, rebounds, steals. How much energy does he bring to this team?

STEVE PIKIELL: He's a self-made player, too. It was good to have his buddy Ace here today to see his career high. He's just an everyday worker. He's not the most talented, but he fights.



He had to guard as good a guard that you can play and forced him to six turnovers today, which isn't an easy thing. I know he had 21 points. He had to earn those, too.

But J-Mike just does what you ask, and he's one of those kids, too, that sub him in, sub him out, it's always the same. He's just ready to help the team. You never have enough of those guys.

Q. You mentioned Ace. What's it like to have him sitting on the bench watching this game?

STEVE PIKIELL: I wanted to sub him in, but I started screaming rebounds, and then he wouldn't help us in that category, either. Last year he drove me nuts, too, rebounding the ball.

One thing about Ace, as great a kid and representative of Rutgers as you can have, proud of him, he's going to have a great NBA career. His best days are by far ahead of him. But miss coaching him. It was too short of a time to have him in the program.

But proud of him. Smile all the time when you see him and he's got that great energy about him. Watch out NBA. He's going to do some great things.

Q. 27 threes, I think nine of your first 11 shots were threes. Was that an emphasis or something Notre Dame was forcing guys into?

STEVE PIKIELL: I mean, we can shoot the ball, first and foremost. I didn't think we shot the ball great. I thought we had some good looks that we could make; that's kind of how they play. They play a back-line defense so they're in gaps. Micah does a great job of keeping you out of the lane and those kind of things.

It's kind of what they give, and when we reverse the ball and run, when we were able to get stops, we were able to get some good looks. I think we even missed a lot of good looks. One of these days they all go in and you look like a really good coach, but I thought we got good looks and we're getting a little bit better in that category, making the extra pass and doing the extra things to help our offense.

Q. In a game like today, it seemed like there was a lot of runs back and forth. How do you manage those runs on the defensive end and on the offensive end to try to stop that momentum?

STEVE PIKIELL: Yeah. I mean, again, you try to string together as many good possessions as you can. With one day to prepare, it's hard. We wanted to keep them out of the lane. That was one of the big emphases that we had,

and I thought we did a pretty good job because Shrewsbury has been lighting people up.

To hold them to 13 points and 3 of 6, he's been getting a lot of attempts up. So we wanted to kind of iso a little bit on him and give less help in his area but then you've got to give a lot of help on the penetration of Haralson and of Burton.

Hard team to guard. They've always been good offensively. They do a really good job.

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