

GEICO Players Era Men's Championship

Tuesday, November 25, 2025

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

MGM Grand Garden Arena

Michigan Wolverines

Coach Dusty May

Nimari Burnett

Postgame Press Conference

Michigan - 102, Auburn - 72

DUSTY MAY: We're extremely excited to be advancing to the most meaningful game this time of year. We came here to really try to improve, to see different teams. It's been a great tournament. We've seen really, really good basketball teams that play contrasting styles.

And we have another opportunity tomorrow to play a really, a team, whoever we play is going to be a team that's going to be in contention for a national championship. So, as we continue to grow and mature together, we're excited for another opportunity.

One thing about our program, anytime we travel and we're in the bunker together, our guys, they gel, they spend time together. And you can see that carryover on to the court. So, just happy with where we are today. Obviously, a lot of work to do. Huge game tomorrow.

Q. Nimari, this is the second straight game you had a big lead, or a big run early, jumped out over the opponent. What do you feel is behind the strong starts these past two games?

NIMARI BURNETT: Just playing good basketball, having a great game plan thanks to coaching staff and getting ready in film sessions. As soon as we got done with yesterday's game, celebrating it for 10 minutes and then washing it, getting ready for the next one, especially a team like Auburn.

We just wanted to come out and play good basketball, and we did that for almost 40 minutes.

Q. Couple guys deeper on the bench. Oscar making that dunk and Winters hitting a 3 (indiscernible). I



could see the reaction on the bench. Could you speak to that?

NIMARI BURNETT: We're just out there having fun, celebrating each other. Everything that we work on throughout the season and the summer leading up to now, you are just seeing it out there.

We obviously still have room to grow as does every team. We're out there having fun, playing off each other, playing for each other. And the results is what it is. So, continue to do that every single night and going into tomorrow.

Q. Since you all lost to Auburn last year in the tournament, any motivation going into this game?

NIMARI BURNETT: Most definitely. It's always a part of the game, especially for us returners. But at the same time the mindset was to come in here and play good basketball on both ends of the floor, to make our marks defensively and let that carry into the offensive end, playing together.

It's just our own instincts and our standard that we want to play to. And we definitely did that tonight.

Q. Nimari, of what your game plan defensively to stop Auburn? And offensively what were some of your goals tonight against the Tigers?

NIMARI BURNETT: We know they rely on their heavy hitters and they're good guys -- Pettiford and Hall, and fighting through ball screens, understanding what they like to get to, whether it's left-hand drives or right-hand drives. And taking that away as much as possible, forcing them into tough shots and cleaning it up on the glass.

We definitely did that for the most part of the games. Sometimes we still fouled when we didn't need to. We definitely learned from that and apply it to the next game and throughout the season.

Q. Nimari, after the win yesterday and the lead-up to this game, and maybe as it played out in the first half, how aware were you and your teammates of the reality of the nature of this event, where to get to Wednesday to play in the championship game you would have to have a certain point differential to ensure -- was that something that you guys were cognizant of as the

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game was playing out or in the lead-up to today's game?

NIMARI BURNETT: It was definitely a thought. At the same time, it's a game of runs. And basketball hits you with some things you didn't expect.

So, we just wanted to come out there and apply what we've been working on for the last two weeks. We haven't necessarily been playing up to our standard, and we wanted to do that no matter what the deficit was.

And we have a really good basketball team. So, as you saw, that in turn comes out to those wins by that margin. So we just did it together. And that's why it was what it was.

Q. Dusty, L.J. played his most minutes in the season today. Seemed like you leaned on him especially once Elliot got the early two early fouls. What you did see from him on both ends of the floor?

DUSTY MAY: I'll start with Elliot. We have to find a way to keep him in the rotation. And he's picked up some ticky-tack fouls. He's learning to play with those. We don't like to foul our guys out, in the first half especially. He's learning to play with those.

But L.J. Cason is a guy with a very high ceiling, and I see -- we see growth and maturity every single day. Seems like he's becoming addicted to the process. He wanted to watch his individual clips first thing this morning. He wants to get better.

I think our program -- the temperature never changes. It's about development and improving. And, so, I think if we can show the ability to help these guys improve their game, then they'll sacrifice, like our guys are doing.

And I feel guilty sometimes when I look out late in the game like that you see some really, really good players that are just now getting a chance to show what they're capable of. But that's also the cost of winning and playing at a university like Michigan and a program like ours.

So just proud of our guys' selflessness and the way they are attacking the process of getting better.

Q. One more game in this event. (Indiscernible), could you speak generally to the fact that you just ran two really good programs out of the gym?

DUSTY MAY: No, we played well both nights and we need to play well tomorrow night. I gave the guys an example: We felt like we've been on the verge of a breakthrough.

And we've enjoyed just falling out of the spotlight a little bit. We've enjoyed that because we had practice time. We had a week.

So there weren't many outside distractions for our group. And, so, they clocked in and went to work and showed great self-awareness to what each guy needed to improve on.

But when I was an assistant at Florida we played in the PK80, and we end up losing to Duke, but played well against Stanford and beat an excellent Gonzaga program, and we felt really good about ourselves; I don't remember where we ranked.

But as soon as we got back we changed inside. Inside our locker room changed for a number of reasons.

And, so, now you lean back on all those experiences so you can get out ahead of what's coming. Now, this is a new one coming for us.

We had preseason -- C.J. actually put the target on our back by ranking us No. 1; thanks C.J. -- we've had the preseason expectations. But it's been nice to hunker down and get in the bunker with each other and get better.

Our season is so long. Auburn is going to look a lot different today than they will in March. We're going to look different today than we will in March. And we have to make sure we look different and that we're more attractive than we are today.

Q. When you said the locker room changed, do you have a few adjectives to describe how it changed?

DUSTY MAY: We lost the next home game to a Loyola Chicago team, which we knew they were really good, but they ended up being a Final Four team. But we just lost what made us, us.

And I don't want to talk about that team other than what I've personally learned from that experience. It's not as if I can diagnose every flaw and every problem. But we felt like we were going to start playing well, and so we got out ahead of what's coming, and inside our locker room we have to be able to -- we can't -- nothing can penetrate our locker room.

And in today's distractions and climate, there's a lot of distractions. So as long as we continue to put our head down and focus on improving, that stuff can't get in our locker room, because we have a group that they really, really, I think, respect and appreciate the way others play the game. And that becomes contagious.

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So it's been a lot of fun. But a lot of credit goes to the four returners, four returners, L.J. and Nimari and Roddy and Will Tschetter. Will Tschetter is not even banging the shots like he's capable of now.

But those four guys, they set the standard with the day-to-day work and the culture of being a student at the University of Michigan and the expectations, the daily expectations.

Then you add in superstar guys who are incredibly unselfish. They like to pass it. They like to compete. Morez Johnson being a junkyard dog.

Obviously, Yaxel gets a lot of the headlines, but Aday's rim protection and Elliot Cadeau, I think those guards have learned a lot from each other. So you bring guys in from different backgrounds and they pick each other, the best parts of each other's games, and they get better.

I thought Trey McKenney had an unbelievable floor game. Every game as a basketball player, he's improved in the nuances and details of the game. He's such an intelligent basketball player. He gets better and better. Just excited to see these guys being rewarded for the work they put in.

Q. As a self-admitted basketball nut, I'm curious on your opinion on the nature of this event. Over the past two days, there's been a lot of reaction over it not having a bracket format. You're obviously a beneficiary of the way you played to play for the championship tomorrow. But the idea that it would be -- it is a point differential. Seth Berger spoke at a press conference before your game at the other arena and said, every intention is that a year from now, when we do this with 32 teams, the format will essentially be the same with four 8-team pools but the teams that get out of that to go on, it will most likely be record and the point differential. Is this a good thing for college basketball? Do you think having something that's different that's not specifically bracket-oriented, that there's room for something like that in the sport, or is it not knowing what opponent you're going to play 24 hours from now? Where do you land in all this?

DUSTY MAY: Fill it up, hoop it up, play against the best, and see where you stand. Guys, I don't spend a lot of time thinking about things I don't have control over, other than maybe we can help it be better for the future.

So we appreciate this tournament. We have an opportunity to play three really good teams, and I assume in any tournament format, someone's making the money. Someone's benefitting financially. So I also don't have a

problem with players making money for being a part of something like this.

But I don't spend a lot of time thinking about it, other than just being excited to play in this tournament. I was excited to play in Fort Myers last year, to go with our team down to Fort Myers. That's when we started to become who we became later in the year, was on that trip together. It could be the vitamin D. It could be the sun or whatever the case, but we enjoy coming into these formats because they're fun. They're on television.

We're watching the interview with two of the Fab Five members being proud of our players. That's really cool for me and our staff as well. So just all those things, I think, they're great for the game. Obviously live sports, college basketball. I turn on TV and I get frustrated because I hear people complain about this and this and I'm watching the game, I'm like, these guys are so good, and we get a chance to compete against them, and this is good for the game.

And is it what I grew up watching and idolizing? No. But I'm very grateful to be a part of it. Is it perfect? No. There's no perfect answers for any of these things. You want to do a perfect format, then it's going to be tough. Then you'd have less teams involved.

I'm a big fan of the high-level games in this type of environment. Was it a sellout? No, but it's probably -- move it to a high school gym of 500 seats and it would be. I've been impressed with the feel of this tournament. It's felt like a sub-regionals, as I think I heard Fran Fraschilla, or one of those guys tweet earlier today or yesterday.

We've enjoyed it. Obviously, if we were 0-2, probably near as much. But next year we'll be back here trying to win whatever bracket or tournament we're in. I don't think our guys are playing like this because of the financial incentive to win. I think they're playing to win a championship, and whatever comes with that, comes with that.

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