

GEICO Players Era Men's Championship

Wednesday, November 26, 2025

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

MGM Grand Garden Arena

Michigan Wolverines

Coach Dusty May

Yaxel Lendeborg

Nimari Burnett

Postgame Press Conference

Michigan - 101, Gonzaga - 61

Q. Yaxel, you said if you all continue to come together you won't be stopped. Do you feel this win can prove Michigan could be the best team in the country, and why or why not?

YAXEL LENDEBORG: Yeah, absolutely. A lot of the guys on the team felt we were being disrespected because of our first, a couple game's struggles. Today was to put the world on notice that we're here to be the best team in the nation, and we'll continue to do that.

Q. You said you maybe felt disrespected by some of the talk about the Wake Forest and TCU games. I guess that implies there was no internal concern even as you guys were hitting those bumps. I guess, what allowed you guys to power through and find a different gear here in Vegas?

NIMARI BURNETT: We practice really hard and we have really good habits we built that through the summer. And Dusty has built that with the guys that were returning as long as we've been here.

It was a step in the right direction of us playing good basketball. We knew we were capable of it. While we'll celebrate these moments and these times together, we still have a lot ahead of us and a lot to accomplish and a lot of our goals that we haven't accomplished yet.

We'll continue to stay composed as a team. One thing that Coach said, those games that were pretty close, we all treated those games that we lost, nobody is really satisfied and proud with those wins. It basically doesn't feel like



we're 6-0 or whatever we are. It's like we're 4-2 or something. We'll continue to keep winning.

Q. What were the last 24 hours like in terms of the preparation knowing obviously Gonzaga coming in, No. 1 team on KenPom, all those things early in the season, how would you describe you got ready for this game?

YAXEL LENDEBORG: I felt we all had 100 percent focus. I was super nervous. I was talking a big game yesterday. A lot of the guys calmed me down, calmed the rest of the team down. We're being super nice and just genuine about the situation. Win or lose, we're going to be here for each other and we'll continue to grow.

NIMARI BURNETT: Yaxel (indiscernible) nervous as you can see.

Just to piggyback off that, we felt like early in the season, and it's still early, but we could be much better in a lot of areas. And cleaning up those areas on both sides of the ball and then shooting the ball very, very well, that's just an add-on to the talent and the roster that we have.

Q. This is the Players Era Championship. You're a couple players, just how dominant you were over the past three days. Can you encapsulate what your experience has been like since you landed on the ground here in Vegas and the joy that comes with the fact that you just won a million dollars for you and your teammates in NIL opportunities?

NIMARI BURNETT: First off it's a blessing I give credit to the most high, Jesus Christ. And I'm so grateful to share this with my brothers.

To be able to play as well as we did is probably the best part, honestly, and like we're also grateful to be getting money as a team, but just grateful to share these moments and celebrate wins and victories together.

YAXEL LENDEBORG: Me personally it's an honor to be part of a team like this. During the last timeout, Coach said a couple words that brought tears to my eyes. I wanted to sit there and cry, but I had to be strong for the squad. But it makes me emotional being part of this.



Q. What are you going to buy with your winnings?

DUSTY MAY: Annuities.

NIMARI BURNETT: Christmas gifts. It's about that time of year anyway.

DUSTY MAY: Roth IRA.

NIMARI BURNETT: The rest is going to go into investments. I'll be smart with my money.

YANEX LENDEBORG: I would say what I'm going to get, but they're probably watching right now. You guys stay tuned, maybe you'll get to see it on social media or something.

DUSTY MAY: Stocks and bonds.

Q. Do you think he got a better dunk than Goodman yesterday?

NIMARI BURNETT: Him? Most definitely. Let's retract that. I'm not going to say that because Oscar's dunk was SportsCenter top 10. I take that back, I'll give it to Oscar. He dunked on somebody. Sorry, X.

DUSTY MAY: It's a good problem.

YAXEL LENDEBORG: I kind of dunked on him.

NIMARI BURNETT: We'll debate about it in the locker room.

Q. Yaxel, you guys held Ike to one point, 0-for-9 from the field. I think just the third time in his career he didn't have a field goal. What was the plan to making him uncomfortable out there?

YANEX LENDEBORG: Yesterday when I went on the podcast with Jalen Rose and Chris Webber, I let everybody know that I think we have the best front court in the world, in the nation. And me and Morez and Aday, we sat there and talked. And we know we're 100 percent better than those guys.

Morez, that match with Ike, we knew who would come out and win. Morez is a super great kid. He's just a dog for us. I can't really put into words how much he means to this team. And Aday, best protector in all of college basketball. They did their thing. Me, I just try my best to get the points up for the guys.

Q. Yaxel, what did Dusty say to you that almost brought you to tears?

YAXEL LENDEBORG: It was just him saying it's an honor to be a part of this team. When he said, I love you guys, that was, damn. A coach that really loves you this much, it's an honor to be part of that, you know.

Q. Why are you confident this team won't buy into all the hype after this great success and have some sort of dip, assuming you're not?

YAXEL LENDEBORG: I feel like we've only had about three guys here who were raised with that kind of hype. In my opinion it will Nimari, Elliot and Trey. And those guys are super genuine, super humble. No matter what the noise is, they stick together with the team.

From day one, Nimari kept me under his wing. It's just something that's really rare to see. A lot of guys are raised with that hype think they're better than anybody else. Nobody on this team thinks they're better than anybody.

NIMARI BURNETT: I appreciate that.

DUSTY MAY: First, I thought I was transparent with my conferences and whatnot. Yax takes the cake. He's an open book and pure soul. And these guys are symbolic of our program. They're great dudes who -- our locker room, it's like a kid zone.

Those guys are in there. They've got a smile. They're having fun. When it's time to work, they work. When it's not work time, then they enjoy each other. And I think they have a lot of respect for how hard, for what each other puts into the game, but also their unique abilities.

I think it's one thing as we were struggling a couple weeks ago, we weren't bringing our own secret sauce to this equation. And I feel like guys are starting to embrace what they really bring to our team.

If they continue to do that and we continue to put each other first, then we'll improve throughout.

Q. The Zags have been scoring a lot of points in the paint, getting after people in the glass. You don't have much prep time, maybe did some work ahead of time, but what did you do to hold them down? What did you take away first?

DUSTY MAY: We were very fortunate that Justin Joyner on our staff was in their league and knows them very well. As I told the guys on TNT, I don't think there's a living basketball coach that I've watched more of their games as a fan than Coach Few. I've competed twice against his team as an assistant, and in both of the games,



immediately after I thought how much I had learned from scouting them, watching them. During COVID I probably watched an entire season of offensive possessions of their group. Hats off to them, the program they built. Everything went right for us today.

Not a lot went right for them. But we knew that they were going to play through their post. It's no secret. They've done it for eternity. And those guys create overreactions. They create advantages and mismatches and whatever the case. And so we knew we had to take care of the paint first.

But when you have that much size and length and versatility like we do inside, I think just the sheer numbers -- and then once you get a couple blocked from behind or the side, I think you start looking around. And that probably happened tonight.

But I thought our guys were flying around making plays, covering for each other. I think we're growing defensively because we're starting to play off of each other better.

Q. You said you felt a breakthrough was coming but I can't imagine you were thinking two 40-point wins and a 30-point win, is that fair to say?

DUSTY MAY: Not unless we were scheduling non-ones. We knew we were getting better. Our guys had re-committed to the work and process. And we were all disappointing with the way we were performing, but we also thought we were doing some good things.

We were doing the most difficult things well. We just had to simplify our approach on the offensive side and just start living in each other's strengths.

Q. And Morez not always filling up the box score, although I guess he did a little bit this week, but what he brings on both ends?

DUSTY MAY: I think our team has adopted his personality. We don't have a rugged group by nature. We have some guys that have grown into being tough, rugged dudes.

But Morez, every single minute of every single day he brings a physicality and intensity, a serious approach to everything that he does. And man, I appreciate him so much.

Kyle Church and I have worked together for a million years, and two days ago he said, we've never had one of those. We've never had one of those, talking about Morez Johnson, just a guy that impacts the game in so many

ways.

And now, because of his work and the staff's ability to help him get better, he's playing well out of the short roles. He's adding to his game. So the sky's the limit for Morez, but I'm very, very grateful for him because he's our enforcer and rim protector with Aday. He does so much but he's also so selfless.

Q. Looking back to the spring when you were building the roster and the vision for this team, why were the traits that you found with the size and physicality and versatility up front so important? I guess how has that vision manifested itself in performances like this?

DUSTY MAY: I was an assistant for Florida under Coach White. And in one year we had top five defense in the country. And we didn't feel we were that good defensively. But because everyone was so big and long, guys just missed shots.

When we got this job we wanted to size up and be bigger and more physical. But there's always that, I guess, conundrum, are you looking for skill, are you looking for toughness, what type of team are you going to be overall. We erred on being really big and skilled. And so, yeah, we built this.

And we had a lot of fun with it last year with the versatility and expanding guys' game. I think every big guy, especially in the U.S., they want to expand their game and they want to be more involved.

These guys trust us that we'll let them know when they're ready for the next step, but they're putting work in every single day to grow and improve. But when it comes to winning time, these guys all just go back to what they do, and that's why we're able to make the plays we made in this tournament.

Q. With defense, we talk a lot about styles, blocks, steals, deflections. But when you have that kind of size, how does that just change the way a team plays and the kind of shots that they feel comfortable taking?

DUSTY MAY: Are you talking about the other team's shots? I know, being a little guy that didn't like to go into the paint, I'd be looking over my left shoulder, my right shoulder. I'd be looking at everything except what I would be looking at. So I can imagine the other team's not doing that exactly, but I think we just have so much size across the board.

And when you look at Nimari's length and Roddy Gayle's

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

length and athleticism -- Trey McKenney is becoming an elite defender for a freshman. Obviously Aday and Yax and Morez, Will Tschetter, the biggest guys, they get a lot of the praise, but L.J. Cason is evolving into a real pest defensively. So I think just the sheer size.

But we weren't covering for each other three weeks ago. We weren't seeing what was going on in front of us and making plays. And I think now we're just starting to take a lot more intelligent risks, calculated risks, whatever you want to call them. And when I take a risk, that I have a teammate cover my back because they're getting used to playing with each other.

And, I mean, we started the season and I think Aday and Morez had been on the court together for maybe 10 days total. They were both just injured at different times. We never really had a group finding their cohesion.

Q. Parlaying off a question asked of the players earlier about confidence going forward. Obviously these dominating performances, you can't forget them. How do you make the players stay in check, basically? Because, again, those were pretty dominating performances against really good basketball teams.

DUSTY MAY: We're not going to lie to them and go in and tell them that they stunk. Now, there's some things we need to improve on. We got a little loose in the second half.

But if we remain about the work and the process of getting better, then we're going to stay on this innocent climb.

If we start listening to everybody else is saying, then we'll start wanting more individually, and then we'll slowly -- there will be cracks in the foundation, and then it will eventually crumble. Hopefully that doesn't happen, because we're aware of what's coming with all of this. And we have a team that as of today is completely bought in to sacrifice, to supporting each other and playing for each other and trusting that the results will be there when they need to be there.

Q. This tournament, seven teams in the top 25 when it started, hell of a preseason tournament. What did you think about the tournament and the venue? Obviously the turnout maybe not what people hoped it would be this first year, but so many people saw this tournament, I would imagine, in the future, it would have a way better turnout?

DUSTY MAY: Yeah, I don't know what you would expect this time of year with so much going on and two games going on at the same time. We felt honored to be a part of

it. I think probably -- we signed up for this at FAU. So this was in the works with Seth a long time ago.

And we had to pinch ourselves at that point to be able to generate revenue to play basketball games against high majors on a neutral site. Those things just don't go together in college basketball.

And so whenever we had an empty, open spot, it was a no-brainer for us. Like I said, I appreciate NIL. I appreciate the rev share and these guys being able to set themselves up for life after basketball, to be able to put a down payment on a house, to be able to do whatever they want to do. The only thing I don't like about NIL is when they buy things that don't appreciate at their age. But that's it.

Q. You mentioned, obviously, you wouldn't have expected these sorts of margins especially tonight against anybody but D-Is basically. Yax says you guys have the potential to be the best team in the country, best front court in the country. What sort of statement do you think your team made tonight just from the 30,000-foot level?

DUSTY MAY: That as of November, whatever today is, we have a really good basketball team with an extremely high ceiling at a low floor.

But to win big at this level, a conference championship, a conference tournament, whatever the case, a lot has to go right. In this tournament, a lot went right. We played three incredible programs.

I never would have dreamed this would have happened in a million years, but it happened, and now it goes back to, like, how are we going to respond to this. So I think we have a mature group. I think we have a group that will continue to put their teammates above themselves.

Q. In a game like this, when you're just cruising, are you able to enjoy it as a basketball fan, or are you just so locked in, you can't think about anything except we've got to get back on defense?

DUSTY MAY: That, yeah. I mean, that group that came in at the end, man, I love coaching those guys. Those guys give a lot, and the reward -- other than winning and what comes with all this -- is an opportunity to play in the games.

And so if you're not in love with the process and you don't love hooping in practice, you're not going to get better.

I'm coaching a full 40 minutes because I love coaching and I love being part of the team. I'm not sitting over there



thinking how great we are right now.

We have a lot of room for growth. And as of today we're a really good team, but we're not anywhere where we need to be if we want to reach our goals.

Q. When you were putting this team together and last year's team together, what gave you the confidence to think that putting two seven-footers together and this year playing three guys playing four, five spots at their previous school would work out this successfully?

DUSTY MAY: I have a very competent and knowledgeable staff, first and foremost. These guys, they work night and day. We work as a group to figure out the best way for us to play.

We just thought, let's get the best players we can get that are also great dudes and we can figure out the Xs and Os and the spacing or whatever the case, but it's going to have to take a group that's going to have to -- we're going to have to experiment. We're going to have to figure some things out on the fly.

We're going to have to drop an add in the middle of the season. Like I said, if you have really good players who are also great dudes and they're competitive, then you can figure it out.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports Scott Drew. And Obi Agbim