

GEICO Players Era Men's Championship

Thursday, November 27, 2025

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

MGM Grand Garden Arena

Creighton Bluejays Coach Greg McDermott Blake Harper

Postgame Press Conference

Creighton 76, Oregon 66

GREG McDERMOTT: Very pleased with our focus and our energy that first half in particular. I thought we executed our ball screen coverage against their two guards, Simpkins and Shelstad extremely well and tried to get it out of their hands and make somebody else beat us.

I thought Josh Dix was absolutely terrific on Shelstad, and Nik was on Simpkins most of the time, did a great job on him.

But we knew Oregon wasn't going to quit. So obviously the second half didn't play out exactly like we wanted to, but we took the punch and we were able to finish the game. Oregon is playing without their center. We experienced a very similar thing, finding out Jackson's out the day before we leave to come out here.

It just is tough on your rotation. You're trying to figure things out. It's different for everybody, and we got lucky that he didn't play today.

Q. Mac, how encouraging was it to see your guys take a punch and respond the way they did down the stretch?

GREG McDERMOTT: It was really good. A lot of guys made plays. And in the locker room, I just credit Isaac Traudt. He didn't play much in the first half. Wasn't crazy about the match-ups, but he makes an unbelievable verticality play at the rim to take away what was going to be an easy layup, and those are things we practice every day. You want to see them carry it over to the game floor.

Some guys into themselves and pout about what didn't happen. Instead, Isaac was prepared for what was about



to happen and executed.

Q. And how much does not having Bittle change your guys' game? When did you know and how did that all --

GREG McDERMOTT: We didn't know until today. We were still going to be aggressive with the ball screen. We thought it was going to be really important. A big part of the offense is those two guys, and we wanted them to take shots we wanted them to take and we thought for the most part we were able to force him them into some challenging shots.

Q. Blake, what allowed you guys to get to the rim, especially the first half? Them not having their 7-footer would help with that, but how did you get so downhill in the first half?

BLAKE HARPER: I feel like, look, since we have been here every team has been super aggressive against us and we have been responding and responding and responding and before the game we made an emphasis that why not we take initiative and hopefully they can play off us, and we control the pace. I feel like it's getting aggressive going downhill. Feeding Kerem down in the post. We got a couple good dunks. Got the energy going for all of us, and we'll take that moving forward.

Q. It was tied 22-22, and I think you outscored them 22-7 the rest of the first half. What changed for you guys in that stretch?

BLAKE HARPER: Just the point of emphasis on getting stops, throwing the ball at it, getting the ball moving and not really worrying about ourselves and buying into the whole game for real.

It's a 40-minute game, it's a long game. We're going to take punches. We have to get back up.

Q. You absorbed contact, wheeled one in, slid on your back, kinda yelled and then you had the shake sequence a few seconds later. What was that stretch like for you? What were you feeling in that stretch?

BLAKE HARPER: I thought it was great for Nik, putting me in the right spots, running the floor. Playing my game I felt



like my teammates helped me get open, especially after I came back off that. It instilled confidence in me throughout the whole week, just making a point of emphasis that I'm all right.

Q. Mac, we didn't know last time we talked to you who you guys were going to play today. What was it like seeing Dana and running into them again?

GREG McDERMOTT: I don't think either of us had a Thanksgiving morning meeting on our bingo card when we got on the plane to head out here. But it is what it is. You try to figure out your team this time of year. This tournament is great in so many ways -- the way we're treated, the way it's organized.

This is our second year, and we think it's outstanding. However, it's not a great tournament to try to find yourself in because you're going to play three good opponents no matter what, and obviously we played three high-level opponents.

So it's not easy. It's tough. It's draining. I think the day off yesterday probably helped us a little bit just to try to get our feet back under us, the practice, talking about a few things that were important.

From that perspective, to get out here with a win like we did at the end last year was really good for us, and with a very important week next week.

Q. What was your biggest overall takeaway from this week in Vegas?

GREG McDERMOTT: Yeah, you grow in a lot of ways. You can grow and be successful, but you find out a lot about your team when you lose. How do they respond? Is it an unselfish approach to their response? Do they take ownership themselves?

We've got to be a team that gives everything we have to our team regardless of how it might impact us individually. And it's no secret I have a lot of guys who can play. I didn't use Austin today, but Austin is good enough to play. It's hard to play ten guys or eleven.

But he has to stay ready. Because today, like I mentioned, today wasn't a great matchup day for Isaac. There's going to be days that are going to be Austin's days. And it's being able to be strong enough and selfless enough to understand I've to stay ready for my team. And I think we grew in that area.

Q. Blake, what does it feel like after the losses on Monday and Tuesday to head back to Omaha with a

win?

BLAKE HARPER: Like Coach Mac said, it's an important week. Just for this tournament, it was quick turnarounds, and kind of got to flush the last game regardless of what happened. Win, lose, or draw, we have the next game coming up. And our team, our coaches really put together a great game plan for a really quick turnaround. Coming in next week with a little more momentum, I'm excited for it all.

Q. What do you want to see as a player over the next couple of weeks? How can this week help you guys move forward?

BLAKE HARPER: Yeah, today was great. We had a great experience, good runs. I felt like they came back and punched us in the mouth in the second half.

And, to be honest, it's like the first time this season that we got back up and ride together and fall right back. So just kind of seeing that really just makes me a lot more optimistic. It's a long season. We'll play a lot of great opponents. I feel like that's a great stepping stone for the whole season.

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