

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - James Madison vs Wisconsin

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Brooklyn, New York, USA

Barclays Center

Wisconsin Badgers
Coach Greg Gard
Mike Klesmit
Steven Crowl
Chucky Hepburn
Media Conference

JMU 72, Wisconsin 61

GREG GARD: First of all, congrats to James Madison. Even more impressive in person than they were on film, and I was really impressed with them on film. I thought their pressure bothered us, specifically in the first half, obviously with 13 turnovers, they really got after us. We didn't handle it exceptionally well, and when we did, we weren't able to finish at times around the rim and missed some easy shots.

But how this group battled back in the second half to get it back to six. When you have 13 turnovers and shoot 26 percent in the first half, you've really dug yourself a hole, but this group has had no quit in them all year. And, you know, to have it back to six twice, and shots to get it closer, they have given everything they had and left it out there on the floor.

So really proud of, obviously Tyler being our only senior, what he's given to this program and these guys to my left, I never had to coach effort, and when you don't have to coach effort, you can have a lot of good things happen, which this group has done. So this is going to sting for quite some time because we felt we could obviously play better, but we'll absorb it and we'll continue to move on.

Q. For Steven, you started off the game pretty well and you had eight points in the first 11 minutes, but the second half, you had just one shot attempt. Wanted to ask you, what made it maybe tough for you to create your own shot against that defense?



STEVEN CROWL: I don't think anything really made it tough. Just trying to play in the flow of our offense. And like Coach said, we cut it to six, so wasn't trying to force anything. I thought we were doing a lot better job in the second half, and it just didn't work out in our favor tonight.

Q. You had a shot, two shots down six, one rimmed out and a lot of contact on a missed layup. Do you feel like if you got it to four or three that would have been the momentum changer you guys needed?

MAX KLESMIT: Yeah, you know, playing with momentum is a really big deal in this tournament and at this time in March. You kind of saw how it played against us early in the first half. But you know, obviously cutting it down to three or four would have helped us out big time. Got the crowd back into it. You know, like Coach and Steve said, tip your hat to James Madison. They were the better team tonight.

Q. Just talk about the start, why they were able to get out to such a big jump.

CHUCKY HEPBURN: They were just the more aggressive team. They kind of just shocked us to start the game and we didn't handle it very well. And, you know, that's how they got the momentum to start the lead and it was just hard for us to dig back up.

Q. How much of the turnovers were a credit to the way that James Madison defended you guys and how much was just forced?

MAX KLESMIT: Obviously the style of play, the way they play defensively, pressure you around the perimeter, different looks when we throw it in the post. They just started building, and we didn't do well enough to handle it early and give ourselves some breathing room. It kind of gave them really confidence. Just something that we didn't handle well out of the gate.

STEVEN CROWL: Like he said, I think it was more of our own doing. We've seen teams like that, like Rutgers and Maryland that want to heat us a little this year. And we just



didn't handle it and get off the start, and ^ that gave them the momentum to think they could do that all game. And props to them for that.

CHUCKY HEPBURN: What they said.

Q. You talked about Tyler being a senior, but a lot of this team returned from last year. How tough is this loss, especially given the momentum you guys had coming from the Big Ten Tournament?

GREG GARD: Well, any time you get to this point in the year, any loss is going to be tough because you scrap and claw, and you work all year to get yourself into this tournament. And then as we've seen with all the other games going on, you have 40 minutes, and if you have a bad segment of that 40 like we had a bad 20, and then you're playing uphill like we did.

Yeah, it burns because you put a lot into this. This wasn't just -- you weren't preparing for this just for four days after Selection Sunday. You've been working towards this since last June. These guys have poured a lot into it and you've seen the tears and the emotion, because it means a lot and they have committed and sacrificed a lot to give to this team.

Q. You talked about you missed some shots at the rim. Does the pressure lead to rushing those shots, you think?

GREG GARD: I mean, game pressure is real. You're not going to deny that. But I thought their physicality caused us to turn the ball over early, and then I felt we also rushed sometimes when the turnovers were coming because of the physicality. We had some unforced errors where we got sped up, threw the ball away.

And yes, we didn't finish around the rim. We had some pretty point-blank looks and even we don't shoot the free throw line as well as we did. I thought offensively, specifically in the first half -- defensively, we held them under a point per possession in the first half. It was just 13 turnovers and shooting 26 percent. That's pretty futile when you shoot that low.

Usually if you turn the ball over a lot, at least you shoot it better because the shots you're don't get, you're throwing it away so it doesn't count against you. But we had a double-whammy in the first half.

Q. You said in your opening statement that you absorb this and move on. What does that look like? When you don't make the tournament one year and you don't win it the next, do you have to take a look in

the mirror and try to figure out how you can get this program back to where you want it?

GREG GARD: Well, I mean, you play through this and you're in a one-game playoff so anything can happen. This group wanted to win a Big Ten Championship. We didn't get there. We got all the way to the finish line last week in Minneapolis, and they didn't get that one. And they wanted to win and advance in this.

So in a 40-minute game, if you don't play well, like I've said a hundred times, you're going to go home. So for us, we fought turnovers and shot selection all year, and those sins came back to get us again tonight, more turnovers than maybe ever. This might be our highest turnover game all year. Probably is.

But those things, that's why you battle all year and teach and coach, to not have that situation where you don't turn the ball over and you don't take bad shots, and you use all those lessons during the year to get to this point so you don't have that happen.

A lot of this is credit to James Madison, too. As these guys said, we haven't seen a team really come at us and we knew they would. Everybody that we talked to that played them said they are going to come at you and they are going to foul you, and it's going to be physical and they are going to reach and grab. And you've got to be able to handle it, and we didn't at the start of the game.

Like I said, 13 turnovers in 36 possessions in the first half is a recipe for disaster, but this group found a way to claw back and found a way to take care of the ball better in the second half. The problem was the hole was too deep that we had dug.

Q. In today's era of the transfer portal, you probably had to do a lot of re-recruiting of guys last year. Do you expect to have a few this off-season and what's your pitch to these guys to come back another year?

GREG GARD: We're 15 minutes after the end of game, so I don't know. They don't know. I mean, we see the world we're in. We'll have conversations. A lot of guys, all but Tyler, have an option to come back, and there will be other options, I'm sure. If guys want to test the waters in the draft or get feedback. We haven't had those conversations yet. We're so raw after the end of the game.

And like I said, you just look at the landscape, that's the environment we are in. So you have to deal with it and prepare. It could go a hundred different ways. But this core is really good. They are really tight. That locker room, it's pretty emotional right now and that told me, or

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

tells me -- it's not the first time I've seen an emotional locker room, but that tells me they are here for the right reasons.

They are here for that, and they did a really good job of representing the front of that jersey. But we are in a different era. There's a lot of individual choices that people have.

Q. This was your sixth tournament appearance. You've had a couple first-round exits, second-round exits, and you've been to the Sweet 16. Where does this loss, in terms of how much it stings, given how well your team performed, how does this rank compared to the rest?

GREG GARD: I don't compare years because every team is different into itself. In '13, we got blown out by Arizona and in the first round, and we turn around and go to the Final Four the next year. I don't like comparing years because the players are different. The momentum through a season is different. Your season ebbs and flows differently. This one stinks because this group has put a lot into it and they had really high goals, and had played really well.

You know, like I said, we didn't play well tonight, and this isn't a seven-game series. So you put your best hand out there, and if it's not good enough, you go home.

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