

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Northwestern vs UConn

Saturday, March 23, 2024

Brooklyn, New York, USA

Barclays Center

Northwestern Wildcats Coach Chris Collins

Boo Buie

Brooks Barnhizer

Media Conference

Q. For either of you, having beaten a No. 1 team in Purdue in back-to-back seasons, how does that help prepare you for a matchup against a No. 1 team in Connecticut tomorrow?

BOO BUIE: Yeah, I mean, I think it's just great preparation. We played against great teams all year long. So playing against a No. 1 is just -- like you said, we played against a No. 1 before. So it's kind of a been there, done that mentality.

Obviously they are a great team, so we are just going to have to be dialed in and locked in from the jump for all 40 minutes. But it gives us great confidence because we've done it before. We've seen it, and you know, we all believe in ourselves a bunch.

BROOKS BARNHIZER: I think the league that we play in, and like you said, playing really good teams like that, it definitely helps. And I think that the Big Ten is super physical and UConn is also super physical. So we have definitely been battle-tested in terms of playing really good teams and playing some of the really top teams in the country.

I think that we have seen that, we've done it before, and it gives us motivation to know that we are able to be in this game. And we are confident going into the game. It's definitely a really good opportunity for us to play the No. 1 overall seed in the tournament, so it's a blessing.

Q. Coming off a game against Johnell Davis, now you're going against Tristen Newton, called yourself the best point guard in the country, do you relish these



opportunities to go up against some of the country's other best players at your position?

BOO BUIE: Yeah, I'm a competitor, so you know, but I'm going out there for the team. That's the only thing I'm thinking about is the team and winning. Nothing personal, you know, in between anyone or accolades like that.

I'm just trying to go out there and be most prepared for myself and for my teammates and have my teammates prepared for the game. Yeah, so I'm not getting into any one-on-one matchups or anything like that. I'm just going to go out there and try to win the game.

Q. Brooks, we saw the Buffalo Wild Wings ad last night. How did that come about and who contacted who? I assume it's an NIL deal. What's your flavor?

BROOKS BARNHIZER: Yeah, we actually have a really good program that helps us navigate all the NIL stuff within our team and for Northwestern. And really it was just our guy that works for our team put me in a group chat with a guy from Buffalo Wild Wings and he said there's an opportunity if you want it.

I thought it was kind of cool and funny. It had to happen really fast because they wanted to get it out there. I don't know if you saw it, the pictures were not great quality. It was cool. I'm kind of a dry rub guy, not really into a lot of sauces, kind of a basic guy. It was a cool opportunity. Cool to have that possibility.

Q. Cam Spencer at Rutgers had a big game against you last year the first time, not so much the second time. What do you guys have to do tomorrow to keep him in check?

BOO BUIE: Yeah, Cam is a really good player. He shoots it very well. He can put it on the floor. Like you said, I played against him before, so kind of got some familiarness with him. I know his older brother. I played with his older brother, Pat. I'm kind of close with Pat. So I mean, we're just going to have to be dialed in on him. Try to limit him from getting to where he wants to get and take away some of his actions that he likes to get to.



Q. How much did winning those overtime games against Purdue and Illinois help you last night in the last ten seconds and overtime?

BROOKS BARNHIZER: Yeah, we played a number of overtime games, and like you said, against Purdue and Illinois, really good opponents just like Florida Atlantic was. Just staying calm and being tough. I think in the time-out, we all looked at each other and like, we can't lose this game and we are not going to lose this game. We told each other, we win close games.

It definitely gives us confidence just being in that situation before, and you know, we were kind of able to just be ourselves and kind of take it to another level once we got in that situation. I think a lot of that comes from being in those situations previously.

BOO BUIE: Yeah, Brooks pretty much nailed it on the head. Obviously when you get in close games -- and in our conference, it's close games basically every game, every single year. And usually, the better teams are the ones who are able to come out on top in the last four minutes or when it matters most.

We just did a great job all year, like you said, of being able to finish out those games. Yesterday, going into overtime, like Brooks said, everybody in the huddle from the coaches to all the way down to GAs and managers, everyone is just screaming, like we are going to win. Just believe in each other, and you know, this is what we are made for and this is what we are built to do.

Q. For those of us who cannot imagine taking the long-range shots you do, can you walk us through how you pick those spots versus how you maybe measure, like, maybe that one is a little too crazy? What is your shot selection thought process during the game?

BOO BUIE: I don't really know. I'm pretty much thinking about, if you leave me open, I'm going to shoot it. But if I'm too far, then I probably won't shoot it. It depends, also, if I've hit a couple or not. Because if I hit a couple, I'm liable to shoot it from anywhere.

But I don't know, my teammates do a good job of getting me open, and if a defender decides to go under or he's a little behind and I have space, I shoot it, and if not, I just pass it to someone else.

Q. Against two bigs like Goldin and now Clingan tomorrow, you're a guy that likes to operate in the post and get to that eight footer. How do you get to that spot when you have a big trying to deny the area?

BROOKS BARNHIZER: It's just knowing where the big is and just reading the situation. I remember there was a play yesterday where I was taking my time backing down whoever was guarding me, and then I saw Goldin kind of come up and our big, Luke, did a good job of kind of getting to the short, like the dunker spot on the other side.

So it's really just going to be trying to read situations like that, seeing if he's coming up, seeing if I'll be able to get to a fadeaway or seeing if they try to force baseline to a big. Not really sure. But it's definitely just going to have to be making reads.

And we always kind of practice that during just practice and simulations that we try to incorporate. It's all just like making a read and making the right play and that's hopefully what we'll be able to do tomorrow.

Q. I don't know if you guys necessarily pay attention, but you are a heavy underdog against UConn, and you were against UCLA last year. How does that experience from last year help you again in another game where you are not favored?

BOO BUIE: You could just call us the underdogs. I've been here five years. I don't remember a time when we weren't the underdogs. It's nothing new. We are just going to come out, we are the underdogs.

BROOKS BARNHIZER: Yeah, I think especially for me, just playing in a second-round game last year, it was really my first tournament experience. And kind of like Boo said, we know once we get deeper and deeper into March, we are probably going to be even more and more an underdog.

It's all kind of, you know, just fun and games with us, because kind of like Boo said, we have always been the underdog. But being there last year and realizing that we have been here before, is definitely going to be a really good feeling going into it the game just to know that this isn't, you know, uncommon ground anymore.

Q. I see you grew up Albany. Did you grow up there? You went to Gould Academy in Maine?

BOO BUIE: Yeah, I was born and raised in Albany, and I went to Gould Academy in Maine. I reclassified my junior year of high school and I did two years at Gould Academy.

Q. Did you ever have any connections with Andre Jackson?

BOO BUIE: Andre Jackson, I grew up with him. He's like

a brother to me, literally since the second grade. We have grown up and hanging out with each other ever since. Now he's in Milwaukee and I go up -- it's about an hour and 15 minutes and I go up like once every other weekend or so and catch a game if I can or just go chill with him and say what's up.

Q. Has he reached out to you that you're playing UConn now?

BOO BUIE: Yeah. He reached out to me before the tournament started. He said, you have to beat FAU so I can make get past and make it to the UConn game. I know he told me he was going to try to be at the game. Hopefully he can make it. I'm not sure with his schedule but he definitely had mentioned that to me before.

Q. You've guarded a litany of really good guards in the Big Ten and now Johnell Davis in the first round. What makes Tristen Newton difficult and what distinguishes his game in your opinion?

BOO BUIE: He's All-American and he has good size. I've played against a lot of great players, great point guards. You know, I'm going to have to come out and take the challenge, and we're going to see.

Q. Last year against UCLA, you guys stayed poised throughout that game, came back, and ultimately it didn't end the way you wanted it to. But I'm curious how that experience against UCLA can maybe benefit you guys now going into this game against UConn.

BROOKS BARNHIZER: Yeah, I think kind of like I said previously, but just the fact that we've been there in back-to-back years, getting there, it's not really uncommon ground for the program anymore. And it kind of gives everybody a sense of confidence going into the fact that we have been there and just the fact that we didn't get it done last year.

Boo had kind of hit on it. We know we're the underdog and that makes us more confident because we don't have anything to lose. We have always been the underdog. It definitely gives us a little experience going into the game.

BOO BUIE: Yeah, there ain't much more I can add to that. Brooks said it. You know, I think that loss in the second round to UCLA has definitely given us a more determined mentality going into this second round, as well.

CHRIS COLLINS: Appreciate everybody coming out. Feel fortunate and excited to be here today. Playing in the NCAA Tournament is awesome. Being able to come out with an overtime win last night, was really proud of our

group. I thought we did a lot of really great things against a tremendous team to get to this point.

The last, not 24 hours, but the last 18 hours or so, we've been diving in to get ready for UConn. You know, I have so much admiration for what Danny is doing and has done with that program, the way he runs his program. He and I have known each other forever. I played with Bobby in college, so I've known the Hurley family since I've been 18 years old, and, you know, they have been nothing but great to me. And recruited some of Danny's guys when he was a high school coach, and he and I have always been very good friends.

I think we have a lot of similarities. Both of us grew up around basketball, we're coaches' kids, and have been around the game. So I've always enjoyed kind of talking to him. I think we've had similar upbringings and kind of coach in a similar manner. To have an opportunity to compete against this program and this team, which to me has been as good as any over the last couple years in the country, is going to be a great honor and definitely a challenge that is going to be tough for us, but one I think our guys are excited about seeing what we can do.

Q. Going back to when you were recruiting Ryan, what was your message to him about playing his fifth year with Northwestern, and in this moment specifically, how much is his experience combined with the experience of Boo and everybody else that played against UCLA last year, valuable?

CHRIS COLLINS: Well, I think when we were recruiting Ryan, there was a great opportunity for him to jump into a key role on a team that we felt could be really good. You know, when you're a grad transfer, you want to play with other older guys. You have one year left. You're not a part of this multi-year rebuild. You've got one year to play. You want to be on a winning team. You want to have a big role and you want to be around guys that you fit in with.

And I thought we checked the box on all those things. We had a huge need for what he brought, his ability to shoot and make plays at the guard position and his experience playing in the NCAA Tournament. And we told him, we felt like if he joined, he would be back. I felt that was something that was important to him.

And then when he came, he just fit so well with our guys. And his experience last year -- I think you saw it last night. I mean, I don't know, after having the first half that he and the rest of our team had, we couldn't throw it in the ocean, but he had played in three NCAA Tournament games last year.

He kind of understood the moment, understood the situation, and he stayed with it. He kept being aggressive, kept taking his shots, and then obviously he got really hot in the second half in overtime. So I think that's where you saw the experience really come out.

Q. When you played, how did Coach K address and handle complacency?

CHRIS COLLINS: Coach was always so good mentally with our teams. I thought he was as good as it got with always creating motivation, you know, day-to-day -- not year-to-year motivation, but day-to-day motivation. Ways to keep our team on their toes. Ways to make sure guys were not in a position to ever get complacent about anything, especially if they had won a lot.

We had been on winning streaks, championships, whatever it may be. He had an amazing ability because of his fire and his competitive nature to really draw that in to us as players, where you know, the moment you relax for one second, he was going to be all over that and make sure that we got back to being the team we needed to be.

And it was something that I really learned from him. I was with him four years as a player, 13 as a coach, so 17 years of my life being around his leadership and his team-building skills and his ability to motivate. There's probably not a day that goes by that something that I do doesn't relate to something he did with one of our players at Duke in terms of motivating or building teams. I'm always drawing upon those experiences with what I'm doing at Northwestern.

Q. Throughout the year, especially playing big guys like Zach Edey, you talk about employing all 15 fouls you had with your big men. Do you plan on a similar strategy with Clingan tomorrow, and if so, where do those extra five fouls come from?

CHRIS COLLINS: I think we have to be a little bit smarter. We don't have the bodies and the depth to be able to say, just take a bunch of fouls on him. We have to be smart. We have to use our bodies. We have to be physical. You know, I think what makes this team so dangerous, though, is Clingan is a great, great player, but all of a sudden if you sell everything out on trying to take him away, you're going to get killed by the rest of the team.

They have so much balance. I mean, five guys averaging in double figures, multiple guys who can shoot, multiple guys who can play in pick-and-roll, make plays. They are very unselfish. That's what makes them so good is you can't really just say, we are going to stop one guy.

We have to do a good job against Clingan. We have to make sure our bodies are on him at all times and take his ability to ^ roll as a lob threat. And when he does get it into the paint, we have to be in tune with our doubling schemes and rotations because they have other great players as well that can burn you.

Q. When Rick Pitino was asked about playing UConn, I don't know if you saw the quote, six of their players got COVID. What goes into preparing for a team like this and do you think something similar needs to happen for you guys to have a chance like that?

CHRIS COLLINS: I'm not going to say that. Look, they are the best team in the country. They have earned that. Do they have more talent than us top to bottom? Probably so. But I think what's beautiful about the NCAA Tournament is it's one game. If we had to play them in a best-of-seven, we are not going to win a series. That's just the reality. They are the better team across the board.

But that doesn't mean on one night you can't put it together. That's what's great about basketball, can we on one night put 40 minutes together where we are dialed in and we can execute and where we can make some shots and where we can somewhat slow down their juggernaut offensively. That's the challenge. One game.

Our guys are excited about that opportunity. I hope playing in our league -- we played Purdue twice, we played Illinois twice, we played -- and I'm not saying those teams are UConn, but they are teams that people feel can be National Championship contenders, and we won two of those four games.

Our guys, they are relishing the opportunity. We have great respect for UConn, but we are going to compete. We're going to come and we're going to compete. We're going to try to be us. We are going to be confident. We are going to do what we do and let's see what happens tomorrow night.

Q. You kind of mentioned Purdue just now, but having beat Purdue in back-to-back seasons, how does that give you added confidence as you prepare for another No. 1 team in UConn?

CHRIS COLLINS: Yeah, I think playing really good teams, our guys, we played in tough venues. We played great teams. Again, UConn is as good as any of them. I mean, arguably, they are the best team in the country. I've watched them from afar. I marvel at the team they have had and how they play together and how tough they are and competitive. And they show up every night. Their balance -- like I said, their balance is really something to

admire.

But again, playing a Big Ten schedule, we played all the best teams in our league two times. All the teams that played in the tournament this year, we played them all twice.

So we've played really good teams. We've played great opponents, and you can't worry about that. I mean, this is one game. Like you have to go out there and just play. You've got to compete. If you are on your heels because of who UConn is, then we have no chance, and that's not the attitude we have to take.

We have to come in believing we can compete, believing that we can win, like I said, in one game. It's not the NBA. It's not a seven-game series. It's one game. You know, can we put it together for 40 minutes and give ourselves a chance to get late in the game and have a chance to win it.

Q. This is the third time in your career you've been in this situation of playing a top-2-seed on short prep. How do those past experiences against UCLA and Gonzaga help shape your preparation for this game?

CHRIS COLLINS: Yeah, any time you can get experience in anything, it's helpful. For our guys, a lot of our key guys went through last year where we won a tough game against Boise State and had to turn around and play UCLA 48 hours later. So they are kind of familiar with how the timing works. You know, playing in the evening hopefully will help. It's a little bit more prep time. We'll have all day today. We'll have an opportunity tomorrow to do a little bit more prep in walk-through.

At the end of the day, though, this time of year, I think you've got to be careful about overcoaching and overpreparing. You have to stay true to who you are, your principles, what you do well. I think if you overload your guys with too much information, it can paralyze them a little bit, and it can get them on their heels and a step slower.

We have to be us. You know, we've got to do what we do. We've got to try to do it at maybe the highest level we've done it all year long. Our defense has to be on point. This is a team that scores a lot of points and they go on runs. They are so explosive.

So I think our ability to not allow them to go on an 18-2 run, the 20-4 run, that's when they get away from people, and then the game for all intents and purposes gets away from you.

So we've got to stay within arms distance and try to stem their runs. And to do that, you've got to defend and then

you have to score. We are going to have to find enough offense. I've said this, some of you guys who follow us in our league, like the Illinois and the Purdues, those games we won, we scored a lot of points.

Like this team is so prolific offensively. Like you're not going to hold them to 50 points. They are going to score. We're going to have to find a way offensively. Like we are not -- we got away with it yesterday. We only had 19 at half. That's not going to work. Like we are going to have to make shots. We are going to have to execute. We are going to have to put the ball in the hole a little bit if we are going to give ourselves a chance tomorrow night.

Q. You mentioned UConn's balance. All of us can see some of their attributes that they have, their size, their speed, some very accurate long-range shooters, their ability in transition. But a lot of talented teams have not been as consistent and overpowering as they have been all season and going back to the tournament.

CHRIS COLLINS: Sure.

Q. What is it about them that maybe only a coach can see that makes them like that, not just the talented team that is up and down here and there, but night after night is on point?

CHRIS COLLINS: I think really it's a direct result of them following the personality of their coach. Really, that's who Danny is. Danny has done an amazing job getting a talented group, a collection of guys, to really buy in to each other, to play as a team, to be unselfish, to not really care who scores, to move the ball, find the right shots.

You know it's very apparent they're a very together group and they are a tough, competitive group. And when I say those characteristics, you think of their coach. So I think that Danny sets the tone with that. His leadership, his ability to mold his program in his personality is really impressive. You know, I think his players are just an extension of who he is. You know, that's probably the best way I can describe it.

Q. Getting back to the sons of coaches like you are, how much do you talk to your dad about this stuff? Do you talk daily? Do you talk specifics? What are those conversations like?

CHRIS COLLINS: Yeah, look, our whole lives we talked, and we've shared a love of ball. I've been in the gym since I've been two years old, and I could walk and stand tagging along, same way Danny has. I mean, we have such a great friendship through our love of basketball. I mean, we have our father/son relationship, but we are always talking

about the game and other games. Did you see this? Do you see that?

I think the one thing my dad has done a great job for me is he doesn't really focus on X's and O's stuff. He focuses on the big picture. For him he was able to coach four NBA teams. And all the situations he took over, they were not great situations when he took them over. Kind of similar to what I took over at Northwestern.

So it was more, okay, how do you build a winning culture? How do you build a winning mindset? You know, the psychological things with your players. How do I get the most out of this guy, what do you need to do?

He's been such a great resource with that, and he's like the grandfatherly figure to my team. It's awesome. My dad's been in the game for almost 50 years in the NBA as a player, in the Olympics, as a coach, coaching Jordan. All the experiences that he's had a chance -- lead broadcaster for so many years. It's so awesome for me. One of my favorite times is when he comes to practice and watches and lets it all settle. And after practice is over, our guys huddle around him and he just is holding court with his basketball experiences. That's really cool for me to be able to share that with him.

We've had such an amazing relationship through the game our whole lives, and it's special to have him be able to come to my games and watch my teams compete.

Q. You saw Cam Spencer twice last year when he was at Rutgers. How much do you reference what you guys did against him at New Jersey to maybe attack him tomorrow, although I know the systems are different now.

CHRIS COLLINS: Yeah, I love Cam. You guys know, I love the Spencer family. We gave Pat an opportunity right off the lacrosse field when no one else would. You know, because of the mindset, I just love how both of those guys are wired. They are just tough, competitive, confident guys that work hard.

And Cam has become a terrific player, man. I mean, starting out at Loyola, going to Rutgers, what he did there, now coming here to the big stage at UConn and what he's done, he gives them an edge.

I think the one thing about him that's really good, he wasn't a part of that team last year. So there's a hunger with him to want to win it, because he didn't get a chance to taste that, the Final Four and the Championship. And I think he's given them a little bit of an edge with his personality and his confidence. He's a terrific shooter. Very smart

player. I think underrated with the ball. Good passer. Plays within himself.

Now that he's playing with the talent base, he becomes even more dangerous because you can't really load up on him either, but you have to do a great job of understanding the things he does really well. You have to get into his air space. You can't give him catch-and-shoot threes and you can't overrun it, too, because he has the ability to get in the paint and find shooters and make plays for others, as well.

Q. Pat Spencer made his NBA debut a couple weeks ago. You took a chance on him, and to see him now playing in the big leagues.

CHRIS COLLINS: It's awesome. I'm so proud of Pat. We talk all the time. We were actually texting a little bit yesterday. I know he's mad that the brackets shook out the way they did. We got to play against his brother. He was with us for one year, but his impact was huge, especially on Boo. Boo was a freshman when Pat was with us, and I thought Pat did a great job showing Boo the ropes of what it takes to be a great athlete at the college level and the mentality and the mindset you have to have.

And now to see Pat -- like he only played one year of organized ball in college with us and now to see him three years later be on an NBA roster, I mean, what an incredible testament to his work and what an athlete, right. That's just an incredible story. Couldn't be more proud of what he's doing. Although I thought his dunk was kind of weak the other night. I told him, I said, "You're more athletic than that. You should have windmilled it or something." He told me he had been sitting on the floor for two and a half hours so he's a little stiff.

Q. UConn has lost three of its last 41 games, kind of a staggering mark. How much will you watch those three contests to see what has worked for other teams in defeating UConn?

CHRIS COLLINS: As a staff, you try to get as much information as we can. We were all in on our FAU prep, at least I was, and that's why you have a staff. We had other guys working on UConn in case this came to fruition. We had a long edit last night. We watched a number of games. Talked about a lot of ideas.

Like I said, you have to be really careful to make sure what things might work, but not deviating because you only have one day of prep. That's kind of the challenge. Certainly you want to look at teams that have had a little bit of success, is there any common thread to that.

38-3, though, that's a pretty good record. There have not

been a lot of teams that have had a lot of success, and that's going to be our challenge tomorrow.

Q. How have you seen guys like Nick Martinelli and Luke Hunger be able to step in and embrace this next-man-up mentality where they are able to play starters minutes on a March Madness team?

CHRIS COLLINS: I think it's the culture of what our program has become. It's something I'm really proud about. We have a belief that now whoever puts the jersey on that we are going to win. We are going to figure it out.

All those guys when we got it to overtime, you guys in the huddle, our guys just said, we are not losing. We are winning this game. And they meant it. You know, sometimes you're just speaking out loud. But you could see it in their eyes.

And for those two guys in particular, Nick, once we lost Ty Berry to go from a 15- to 19-minute guy to almost the whole game and having more expectation on him to score and defend. Same thing with Luke, he redshirted last year with a broken foot so he's really a freshman.

All of a sudden you're starting freshman, playing on the biggest stage against the best players. For him to come out and get eight points, eight rebounds, four assists, make some big free throw, just really proud of those guys. And it's also a testament to our veteran leadership because they give those guys the confidence they need. When you're out there with older guys that are pumping you up and giving you confidence, I think that there's nothing like that and that's what our older guys have done for those guys.

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