

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Morehead State vs Illinois

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

CHI Health Center

Illinois Fighting Illini Brad Underwood Marcus Domask Dain Dainja

Media Conference

Illinois 85, Morehead State 69

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Well, obviously you feel good anytime you get a win in the NCAA Tournament. It was kind of an inconspicuous start being down 9-0 in the first minute and a half. I actually thought we played okay after that. We were up one at half, so it's kind of a plus 10 for the rest of the half.

But I give Morehead a lot of credit. They're extremely well-coached. They have very, very good players. Riley Minix coming from the NAIA level, doing what he's done this season, is nothing short of spectacular. It just goes to show there's great players everywhere.

We recruited Jordan Lathon, so we knew he was a great player. That's a very good team, and obviously they had a great, great season.

I thought we had a great spurt in the first half to kind of get it up seven or eight. I thought that Dain's insertion in the game was obviously critical. He had 21, a season high.

Then the all-around game of Marcus, I think somebody told me he's the 10th player in the NCAA Tournament history to have a triple-double. That's a pretty special night.

So very, very solid. Luke Goode was tremendous off the bench, not just offensively making threes, but his defense I thought was very, very good. He provided great energy, and I thought that Dra Gibbs-Lawhorn was spectacular in the first half at both ends of the court.

Survive and advance. We move on, and excited about the



opportunity to take on a great Duquesne team.

Q. Brad, Shannon played particularly productive lately and again today in the first half. How do you explain the way he's played lately?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Well, one, there's nobody that works harder than him, so success doesn't surprise me when you work as hard as Terrence does. When he gets -- he gets most of those points kind of through the flow. We don't run a lot to him. We don't run a lot of actions. We don't have to. But he gets going in transition. He's special. He gets going to the foul line. Tonight was a quiet night for him at the foul line, 5-of-6. But when he's making threes, he's awfully good.

Nothing surprises me with Terrence. I think he's one of the best players in the country, and he's been proving that here in this stretch.

Q. I wanted to also get your thoughts on the play he made early in the second half. He dove for that loose ball and threw it off the Morehead kid.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: You know, and these guys will tell you, I've been preaching for a month about the 50/50 balls, diving on the floor for a loose ball, and I tell the story, I didn't go to the Sweet 16 at Stephen F. Austin because we didn't dive on the floor for a loose ball.

Those are the plays that separate you. When arguably your best player does that, it means a lot. Everybody else has got to step up to that.

Q. Dain, just talk about your game, especially the second half.

DAIN DAINJA: Yeah, tried to come out, doing whatever I can to help the team win. Whatever that looks like, whether it was me rim running or rebounding. I just want to do whatever it takes to help the team win. This is a team effort, so we're in it together.

Q. Brad, Duquesne just played a BYU team that like you guys is very comfortable playing and winning in the 80s. They're very good when they get to 70 first. What do you expect in terms of a contrasting style



against Duquesne when you see them next?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Well, I didn't watch hardly any of that game, and I do know this: I know how well they're coached. I have so much respect. I've done a lot of clinics over the years with Keith. I've known him back since my junior college days.

I know his teams are extremely tough. I know they're going to fight. To me, that was not an upset. That was not shocking.

The Atlantic 10 is a tremendous league, and I think they started 0-5 if I'm correct.

Then to get to this position, that's on a coach. That's on a coach leading his players in the right direction.

We know we've got a tough game. They did a great job looks like numerically from the three-point line and taking that away from BYU. Yeah, we'll have to play well, no doubt.

Q. Marcus and Brad, what has Dain given you in this postseason?

MARCUS DOMASK: Yeah, Dain gives us a presence down low. Obviously with Coleman at the 5, it's a different look, so when Dain comes in, our team kind of changes, and it makes teams adapt to what we do.

Then like 9-for-9 is insane. He went 9-for-9. Just the efficiency is off the charts. Even defensively I know he's been blocking shots a lot better, just his overall presence down low is just a hassle for teams.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Well, eight rebounds, the blocked shots. We know Dain can score. Dain has always been a very, very capable scorer. But his presence, his physicality -- we're not here or not winning a Big Ten championship without him, what he did last weekend.

Just the simple things that he's doing, they're not all post-ups, they're rim runs, they're offensive rebounds. That's doing what we ask. That's being extremely coachable. Our team does take on a different personality.

You've seen Coleman slide to the 4 and be able to guard perimeter guys a little bit.

His presence in the paint has been very impactful.

Q. Marcus, I know a lot of half-court offenses went through you, but what's allowed your play-making to go to a higher level?

MARCUS DOMASK: I think it starts with just guys hitting shots. You get assists when the guys hit shots, so when guys hit shots, assists kind of rack up. But other than that I'm trying to play within the game, play within the flow of the game and take what the defense gives me. I try not to force anything and just make the right decisions.

Q. Brad, you've talked a lot about Dra and how hard he's worked. Talk about his mindset. In the Big Ten title game with a big shot and today with two solid threes.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Yeah, it's amazing what confidence does, and that's a two-way street. My confidence in him. I like what he does defensively as much as what he does offensively. I've said it for a long time. I think he's a terrific shooter.

Both of these guys will tell you, he gives us fits on the scouting team, on the scout team in terms of preparation. He's earned the right. He's really talented. He's still learning the game.

But I didn't have any problem putting him in today.

Q. Coach, you mentioned about preaching. Duquesne were pretty proud of themselves in terms of battling for the 50/50 ball. Are you expecting another sermon tonight in terms of preaching to the guys the importance of 50/50 balls, eliminating second-chance points against a team that showed they're capable of doing that?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Absolutely. We have a saying in our program, it's a moniker we live by every day, so absolutely I'm going to preach those things.

It's this time of year when you don't do those things that you can go home. Their game today was a very, very close game. It's a one- or two-possession game.

I did see, the one play I saw just happened to be the side out of bounds play where they stole the ball. Those things are huge.

Keith has not been successful as a head coach because his teams don't do those things. We're going to have to match that nasty and that grit, so we'll start preaching that tomorrow when we get together again.

Q. Marcus, is this the reason you came here from Southern Illinois? You wanted to play on this kind of stage in these kind of games?



MARCUS DOMASK: Yeah, it is. Through the portal and in the process, me and Coach pretty much just had conversations about winning big games in March. That was the No. 1 thing that I was looking for in a school, and I trusted Coach and felt like we had the opportunity to do that here.

This is the time that all the time you put in the gym pays off.

Q. Marcus, when was the last time you had a triple-double?

MARCUS DOMASK: High school, senior year of high school I had a couple.

Q. Dain, did you have any point during the season when you had to kind of get yourself over a hump just in terms of your outlook because you weren't playing as much as you wanted to? Did you struggle at any point?

DAIN DAINJA: No, I actually didn't. For me it was just like the energy I was bringing to the team, which started in practice. I kept myself up by doing things off the court with Fletch, just being in shape, doing workouts, extra cardio before and after practice, just those little things kept me going.

Q. Brad, have you figured out the slower starts, digging the holes yet or have you seen anything similar from the last couple games?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Yeah, we're going to give a different pregame speech than what I gave today and at Ohio State and Nebraska. That one is 0-for-3. I've failed these guys in that area.

No, we've got to avoid those. We've got to avoid those. They're smart. They understand that. But again, it's something that we can't have moving forward. That's on me. That's my job to get them bouncing off the ceilings here as we go.

We did that the last regular season game at Iowa, so we know we're capable.

Q. Marcus, could you kind of elaborate a little bit on your feelings at getting that triple-double? That's only been done 10 times in the NCAA Tournament, and just to do it on this stage.

MARCUS DOMASK: Yeah, it's definitely a cool accomplishment to have my name up there with some of the greats, and such few people have done it so far. It's a

great accomplishment. But at this point in my career I'm really past all the personal accolades, and at this point in March it's all about winning, and that's really all I'm trying to do.

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