

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

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Denver, Colorado, USA

Ball Arena

Wisconsin Badgers Coach Greg Gard Xavier Amos Steven Crowl John Blackwell

Media Conference

Wisconsin 85, Montana 66

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Wisconsin.

Coach, if you could start with some comments on today's game.

GREG GARD: Sure. Obviously you get to this time of year, you know you're playing a really good team, which I was impressed with Montana on film. We were able to establish the point early, I thought was important, take advantage of things in there.

Give them credit. Every time we were starting to bust it open, we get it to 11, they'd hit a three. We got it to seven, they hit a three. We were finally able to pull away on the back half of the second half. Obviously a team that's had a really good year, played a lot of really good basketball.

For our sake, we're just happy to be moving on. Think we can play even better. I thought we got a lot of contributions across the board off our bench. Depth has always been a strength of this team all year. It's good to get in this and get the first one. Now we get ready for Saturday.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. How does this feel this year compared to last year? Does this one kind of take away or erase some of that disappointment?



STEVEN CROWL: Yeah, no, for sure. Like you said, we were trying to get that taste out of our mouth of last year. I think this game did it. Like coach said, everyone contributed, which almost feels better when everyone gets on the box score.

I saw it as a great team win.

Q. John, coach talked about the challenge of pulling away. Seemed like in the second half the defense kind of started to make some inroads there. What was maybe getting better? What helped you settle in a little more?

JOHN BLACKWELL: I think just our guards and bigs, we told each other kind of have a little bit more bite to us, don't let them get into our paint. I think we did that good, shut off their guard, made it difficult. Then just rebounding and pushing on the other end.

Q. Xavier, you made an impact on both ends of the floor. Your first NCAA tournament game. What was it like out there for you? What does it mean to you to be able to help this team?

XAVIER AMOS: I definitely just felt the energy, the atmosphere of being here, playing with these guys all year. Come here, try to do big things in this March Madness. It's just a blessing here. I'm happy to be a part of it.

Q. The stretch in the second half where Carter hit that big three-pointer, took a charge, hit another jumper, how big was that to calm the waters?

JOHN BLACKWELL: Well, I just think he's a major key to our team, he's a sparkplug off the bench. He's a vet. He knows his role and excels in his role. He's a guy that is always going to give us energy, zero points or 15 points, his energy is not going to go down. We love him for that and are going to keep going.

Q. John, you took the Money Williams assignment tonight. You did a good job forcing him back. Can you talk to us a little bit about that.

JOHN BLACKWELL: I just looked over the film. He's a great player. He's been getting it going lately in these last



five games. I just tried to make everything difficult for him. A guy like that, he's just a hooper. If he gets in a rhythm, it's going to be hard to stop him.

My coaches set me up with a good plan to try to stop him, get him from not going off, so yeah.

Q. In the second half, seemed like you found your rhythm inside. Their two big guys put up a fight in the first half. How did you feel you were able to find the rhythm in the second half?

STEVEN CROWL: I mean, I think I've got to give credit to my coaches and teammates for being on my about staying aggressive. Second half, got it going a little bit in the inside. Obviously we knew we had the size advantage. Wanted to take advantage of that. Like I said, credit to my teammate and coaches for giving me the ball.

THE MODERATOR: We'll dismiss the student-athletes. Thank you, fellas.

Questions for the coach.

Q. As far as Xavier goes, obviously he's been a guy in the rotation pretty much all year. As a coach, what kind of satisfaction does it give you? Maybe satisfaction isn't the right word, but how much does it please you to see a guy that toiled so long be able to show what he's been able to do?

GREG GARD: Yeah, I think obviously his line score jumps out. You think he's got 11 points. But it was the defensive plays he made. He blocked some shots in the first half. He covered up. He rotated. He brought some energy to us defensively that got us going a little bit in transition.

I think that's been a growing area for him. Defensively continuing to get better and understanding when you can help, how to help, what your assignment is, who you're guarding, is it a shooter, not a shooter, then how you can help your team.

I thought defensively he got punch drove once by Pridgen in the second half where he helped a little too long and took a bad angle. Other than that, defensively I thought he did some good things.

Q. You mentioned you think your team can play even better in the next round. Where do you want to see cleaned up a little bit?

GREG GARD: I think we had a couple careless turnovers at times. We had two late there in the last minute, two or three. As a coach, my expectations are never met in that

regard, so I always want us to take care of the ball.

We were a little choppy at times offensively in the first half. I don't know if J.T. really got going, Tonje. He got to the line. I think we'll shoot it better, just get into a rhythm. I think this one was a grinder, which we felt it would be how Montana plays, how good they are defensively at plugging a lane, not getting spread out.

I think just even getting through this first game, a game under their belt, is always important. Now you want to take another step 'cause you're going to be playing an even better team regardless of who it is on Saturday.

Q. The sequence with Carter in the second half, how much do you think that contributed to you guys being able to settle things down?

GREG GARD: That was huge. He's done that all year for us. He's made big plays. We've had other guys make big plays at big times. I think our bench has been one of our strengths throughout the year. We've gotten great contributions off it. You saw Amos tonight, McGee has done that throughout the year. Janicki has done it at times. Obviously Gilmore.

They know I don't want them to be bashful. I don't want them to be passive. I want them aggressive when they come in. Obviously Carter took advantage of his opportunities there. Then we went right back to him on another little post play and he scored on that, too.

When he's got some confidence going, it's good that his teammates find him.

Q. Obviously Montana, top 10% in the country in spot-up threes. What was the message at halftime?

GREG GARD: We talked about that. Thought we gave up a couple stare-down threes where we didn't close with enough sense of urgency. We didn't come out with hands up and contest. We talked about that, not giving stare-down threes, making sure the guys we identified as shooters, we have to get them off the line, stay hot on them.

I thought we did a better job. Kai Johnson got loose on us once on an out-of-bounds. We took the wrong route, chasing a screen. I thought we were better. We were more aggressive into the ball, which helps get shooters off the line.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time, coach.

GREG GARD: Thank you.

