

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - BYU vs Wisconsin

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Denver, Colorado, USA

Ball Arena

Wisconsin Badgers
Coach Greg Gard
John Tonge
Steven Crawl
John Blackwell
Media Conference

BYU 91, Wisconsin 89

GREG GARD: Yeah, obviously the flurry and the heart and complete grit that we showed to make a comeback like that and have a chance in the last possession is a credit to the young men I've got in the locker room and these three obviously to my right.

I've been doing this a long time, almost 35 years, and as I told them, watching them grow together from the time we got together in June to now may have been the most fun, enjoyable year in my career.

We were highly doubted early. We weren't even supposed to be in this tournament. Supposed to be finishing 12th in the Big Ten maybe, and this group just bought in and committed to each other and were so much fun to be around every single day and so much fun to coach, and the joy that they played with and how they bonded together is really, really special.

Today stings a lot because we worked a long time to get to this position and have a chance, but in the big picture, I couldn't be more proud of the group of how they committed to each other and to our program and continued to get better through the year.

In terms of the game, I thought BYU did some good things. It took us a while to get our feet defensively. We didn't until a little bit in the first half, and then a little bit better in the second half. Just probably the offensive display that everyone expected, having two really, really good offensive



teams.

Unfortunately we weren't able to get traction a little bit earlier defensively, and then obviously don't have a ball go in there at the end.

Like I said, I'm really proud of this group. The ending stinks, but the ride was a hell of a lot of fun.

Q. John, can you take us through that last possession, and did you get the look you wanted?

JOHN TONJE: I just tried to get downhill. Just got kind of stopped around the block area. At that point I didn't know what options I had, I just tried to go up with it. I'm not sure. I guess I'll have to watch the film.

Q. John, could you take us through -- I know it was a tough ending for you guys, but just take us through your guys' comeback. You trailed 89-78, and then you got back in it. What was the keys there?

JOHN TONJE: We just believed in each other. We just kept fighting back, kept encouraging each other, letting each other know what was at stake. I'm proud of the guys just for fighting to get back in the game and giving everything we had.

Q. What happened in that first half when you guys started slow, got close, and then they just kind of had a surge? What was going on defensively in that first half?

STEVEN CROWL: I think the biggest thing was just the offensive rebounds. They had, I think, 12 points off offensive rebounds in the first half, so that was kind of the difference. Once you get in a hole that big, it's hard to dig out. Like Coach said, we tried to put on a comeback, but when you're coming back from that much, it's tough for sure.

Q. Can you just talk about -- you had spoken well of your bench the other day, but talk about the discrepancy in bench points. It was 24-3 at the end, and at one point it was 24-0.

GREG GARD: Our bench didn't score. Some of it was we

had some foul trouble and different things, and the scoring wasn't the issue. It was our defensive end. We scored enough points to win the game. Can't give up 91.

But every game it's somebody different. I got 37 out of my best player. He had a hell of a game. The bench didn't have those same opportunities, as I was saying. But we had to juggle some foul trouble. I had some guys with two in the first half, Gilmore got two. Klesmit, McGee was battling foul trouble there a little bit in the second half that put us a little bit out of rhythm.

But we got enough offensively from everybody. It was the defensive end, specifically in the first half. Even how we ended the first half, we shot the ball with 14 seconds to go, and then come down and they get a three.

Like I said, we had a hard time getting our footing defensively in the first half. We did for a little bit, and then we lost it.

And second half we were somewhat better, but that's a hard team to guard. We're hard to guard, too, and they were able to make a couple more shots than we were.

Q. Can you talk about was that the play you wanted at the end with John, or was there something different that they forced you into?

GREG GARD: No. Put the ball in my best player's hands. And we were in a flat alignment with some bumping action with the bigs on the two other guards, and it was his decision on what -- you trust your players. We're not in this position without John Tonje. We don't have that comeback. We don't have the year and win 27 games without J.T.

We made the decision, we were coming down, we had done it before. Put the ball in your best player's hands and let him go make a play.

Q. What happened with the technical on the bench? And obviously with the end result being a two-point game, is that something you'll go back and look at?

GREG GARD: They had two technicals and an ejection. I don't know, the official couldn't tell me what was said. He didn't know. I don't think anything was said. Apparently two assistants stood up. I didn't know you got technicals for standing up and stomping your feet. If they stomped their feet, I don't know, but they did.

And like I said, it's the first time -- I've said a lot of things this year and haven't even come close to getting a technical, and for some reason we had one in that

situation. It hasn't happened all year. I don't know why it would come out in that regard. But maybe he couldn't remember what was said.

Q. Just curious your thoughts on this BYU team that you faced and what you saw from them and maybe the coaching job that you've seen from Kevin Young in his first year with the program.

GREG GARD: Yeah, he's got really good players. That makes good coaches. I'm a good coach because I've got really good players. It doesn't happen by accident. He's got good players. Saunders is really good. To come out, watch him warm up, the ball comes off his hands really well. Demin as a freshman at that size, obviously you can tell he's been trained in the European ball screen stuff from Russia. Obviously I thought Mag has improved. We played against him at Rutgers for four years. He was just a defensive stopper there. Keita I thought has gotten better since he's come from Utah.

And the other guys are doing a good job of filling their roles. Boskovic hit a big three. Down through the lineup. Knell did a good job, banged down some threes when they needed them.

But Saunders, you could tell he's a gamer. He's a winner. Had six offensive rebounds. The kid knows how to play. When you've got to have a guy like that, and I've got a lot of them, too, that play with the heart and the energy and the unwillingness to lose, you can do a lot of good things, and they've had a good year, and they get to keep playing.

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