Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Maryland Terrapins

Buzz Williams

Diggy Coit

Elijah Saunders

Postgame Press Conference

Maryland - 70, Oregon - 60

THE MODERATOR: We are joined first tonight by the Maryland Terrapins. Maryland will advance to take on the No. 9 seed Iowa Hawkeyes tomorrow at 11:00 a.m. Central at the United Center. We're joined by Coach Buzz Williams and student-athletes Diggy Coit and Elijah Saunders.

Q. Guys, what was the general mindset going into today and playing multiple games possibly multiple days in a row?

ELIJAH SAUNDERS: Just take it one day at a time. I felt we're as connected as we've been all year. So just keep playing for each other and playing for the guys next to you.

DIGGY COIT: I would say the same thing. Just trying to keep the main thing the main thing, lock in with each other. Best we probably felt as a team in regards to leadership and intangibles. So it definitely paid off.

Q. Can you speak a little bit more about the momentum this win gives you as you head into the next round?

DIGGY COIT: I think it gives us the right momentum if we take advantage of it, knowing that we played a game. We felt, we've seen what we've got to work on for tomorrow, what we've got to think about. I think we know at least what we have to do on the court together, being on the same page, talking, communicating, being great teammates.

So I think it just keeps us focused for tomorrow.

Q. What were you guys able to do differently tonight obviously playing Oregon earlier in January, lost by 10, what was different tonight?

ELIJAH SAUNDERS: I just felt we were able to defend the rebound at a higher level than we have been earlier in the season. When it comes down to March, whoever can defend the rebound and not turn the ball over is going to win. Just sticking to those principles.

DIGGY COIT: I think from what's been going on in the locker room, starting with Coach and the rest of the staff, leaning into us, I think we're a completely different team from top to bottom than we were when we first seen them. Not just the result, but how we are as individuals with each other, I think we're just completely different.

Q. What are your guys' first thoughts about Iowa tomorrow morning? Obviously an earlier matchup, but what are your guys' thoughts on getting some sleep and waking up early?

DIGGY COIT: They're going to play hard, and we've got to be ready. That's all I can think about.

ELIJAH SAUNDERS: Yeah, playing a team we've already played twice. Get some rest and get ready to play.

Q. In terms of on-court performance, what did you guys like most about the way your team responded tonight?

DIGGY COIT: I would say I thought the bench was really into the game. I thought every huddle that we went into nobody panicked. We knew exactly what we were doing wrong. We were all on the same page. I would say those were the two main takeaways.

I felt like this was the most we were together since for a very long time. I felt that way about our last home game and today.

So I would say just us, how happy we were for each other, how connected we were.

Q. Coach, this was the third time the two programs have ever met and the second time this season. How has your understanding of Oregon evolved since the first matchup this season?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I think we played them the first weekend in January. I think it was our third conference game. So we watched that game just to kind of have some context.

Our team has changed a lot tactically. I think our team has also changed relative to the roster and how it's utilized. I would say the same thing about their team. There's still remnants of what we do and what they do, but if you've played 20 games in a conference season and the last time you saw them was 17 games ago, there's going to be a lot of differences.

Our staff was tremendous in making sure that we didn't overload our guys. We played the last game of the regular season in the Big Ten, and then obviously we played the first game in the Big Ten Tournament. So we didn't practice. So our practice was in the film room.

I think our staff was as good as they've been all year in making sure that what we explained to our guys without them having an opportunity to practice it not only could our guys understand it, but they could do it and take it from the film room to the floor. I thought a lot of that took place this afternoon.

Q. You were talking about it earlier, but what was your mindset coming into today? Were there any similarities in your prep or your scout process compared to the Players Era Tournament back in Vegas?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Oh, are you saying going into tomorrow?

Q. Correct. Today and tomorrow.

BUZZ WILLIAMS: Well, we play in 16 hours. So that means we'll be here in 14 hours. I would say that we'll try to do a little bit of it tonight after they have dinner, but I think we've morphed relative to what is best for this group.

When we played at the Players Era, I think that was Game 5, 6, and 7 for us. With 15 new players and all new coaches, I don't think we really knew who we were or what was best, and I think there were a lot of guys playing then, some because they were healthy enough, some because we were trying to figure it out.

Our roster is completely different now. Our style of play is completely different on both sides of the ball. Within the volatility of the season, we've continued to try to adapt.

I think we've been in a pretty good rhythm for how we handle prep for our opponent. It will just be an abbreviated one. You don't want to give them so much that they're confused. You want to give them just enough so that it helps.

And Iowa is a unique scout. What our plan was when we played at Iowa, we had a different team relative to our roster -- who was playing, who was starting, who were our significant players at that time -- than when we played them in College Park. And our plan was a lot different.

We'll probably spend most of our time talking about the difference between the two going into Game 3.

Q. Just talking about tonight, what did you like most from what you did in tonight's win and what you'll take into 16 hours from now?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: The thing that translates the most for us regardless of who we play is can we play with a low turnover rate? If we don't give the ball to the other team, we at least have a chance to get an offensive rebound. On occasion we'll get fouled.

Then also, when we don't turn it over, we have a chance for our defense to get set. What we've tried to do more over the last month and a half is how can we figure out a way to minimize our turnovers, and how can we figure out a way to minimize the opponent's offensive rebounds? Just from a time of possession standpoint, mathematically we give ourselves more of a chance.

I thought in the first half we were arguably as good as we've been in those two ways. In the second half we turned it over a little bit more than we should. We gave them too many offensive rebounds. But the thing that we have to figure out how to improve on is how to defend without fouling.

In our last regular season game, the Number 1 offense in our league, they shot five free throws in the first half. In the second half, they shot 21. Today Oregon shot eight free throws in the first half and 13 in the second half. It's just it's hard for us to overcome points without the clock on because offensively we have to play a certain way just to kind of thread the needle on what gives us the best chance.

If you're going to beat Iowa or any team going forward, we're going to have to defend without fouling more than we

have the last two games.

Q. And talking about Elijah Saunders, 5 of the last 6 games, he's hit three or more 3-pointers. Talk about how he's opened up the offense.

BUZZ WILLIAMS: A lot of our paint touches over the last nine weeks have to come off the bounce. Our coaches have done a really good job of -- it's not a play. Whatever play we call is aborted once we get penetration, and relative to where the penetration is, that dictates what we do. Our team has been continuing to figure that out.

A lot of that will end up with Elijah on the perimeter because we don't have anybody to throw it to, and offensively obviously it looks better. I think we made nine 3s on Sunday, and I think we made nine 3s again today.

From an effective field goal percentage, as you know, that helps us so much if we can shoot more 3s, and we have been shooting more 3s over the last six weeks, but if somehow we can make it and not turn it over, it gives us a chance to get an offensive rebound as well.

Q. How important was it for you guys to set the tone early against Oregon, and how were you able to keep up that momentum after halftime?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I thought we played from start to finish in the first half probably as well as any half that we've played. Whether we've been at home or on the road or neutral site, from a low turnover rate, from an offensive rebounding percentage, even a defensive rebound percentage, and we didn't foul. That was really good. They didn't foul us, and we didn't foul them. So now it's a push. That was good.

I do think to some degree we absorbed their two magnificent runs probably with as much maturity as we have at any point in the season. I didn't think that we just disintegrated emotionally. Then I thought there was some collective thought on trying to maintain and play to the scouting report. So that was encouraging.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Oregon Ducks

Dana Altman

Nate Brittle

Kwame Evans Jr.

Postgame Press Conference

Maryland - 70, Oregon - 60

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Oregon Ducks head Coach Dana Altman and student-athletes Nate Bittle and Kwame Evans Jr.

DANA ALTMAN: Really disappointed in the way we started the game obviously. It's my job to have them ready to play, and that first half was awful, another way to put it -- offensively, defensively. We were down 12 on the boards. We didn't do anything right.

The guys really battled, tried to get themselves back in it the second half, cleaned up some of the board play, made a couple shots. Really disappointed for the guys, especially these two guys. Nate's out with injuries all year and fought his tail off. KJ's tried to hold it together throughout the year. Really disappointing for these two guys because they tried to keep us in it all year.

Guard play has suffered throughout the year. Today they obviously didn't shoot it very well, which was part of our problem.

Q. Nate, it's been five, six years. You've been at the Oregon fold. I'm curious when the final buzzer goes, what's going through your head there?

NATE BITTLE: Just how blessed I've been to have been part of this program for five years. I came in as a freshman, had to work my way into the lineup and everything. I built a great relationship with this guy here. Teammates I've had throughout the process, whether my freshman year all the way till now has been a blessing. Nothing I'll ever take for granted. I'm thankful to be part of this program.

Q. When you guys got back from that game there, it was just a few days ago that you had a miraculous run to close a game. Did you feel like this game was getting close again or you had an opportunity?

NATE BITTLE: Yeah, but we had a couple turnovers there that caused some easy buckets for them when we cut it down. We just had to do a better job of taking care of the ball and rebounding. We just didn't come out ready in that first half. They jumped on us early, and ultimately they got the little gap lead there. We tried to fight back, but it wasn't enough.

Q. Kwame, there's so much transition in college basketball. You guys have new teammates every year. You and Nate have been together for quite some time now. What does it mean to you to sit next to him one last time and what's the relationship between you two?

KWAME EVANS JR.: I'm grateful for it. I've been with this guy since I've been here, and he's been leading us. Watching him every day coming in, even if he's been hurt, to see him leading by example, it was great to be with him one last time and just really grateful for it.

Q. Dana, just with the end of this season, the end of this game, what's your emotions right now?

DANA ALTMAN: I'm disappointed for these guys. They've been in two NCAA Tournaments, last year, the last two years, and the expectations were for us to win again and we didn't. Part of that's injuries. Part of that's poor decisions that I made in recruiting and not getting enough experience.

So when our experience did go down, whether it was Jackson or Nate, we weren't able to keep anything together. I mentioned our guard play. We haven't had the assist-to-turnover ratio, the ball movement, the playmaking for KJ and for Nate that we needed to.

No, I'm disappointed. It's been 30 years since I had a losing season or my teams have had a losing season. So

it's kind of hard to digest.

Like I said, I mostly feel bad for the guys that Nate doesn't get to do it again, KJ gave us everything, Sean gave us everything. The guys were all in, and it just didn't work out.

Q. When it comes to kind of moving on from this and building for next year, obviously in today's college basketball it's hard to tell who's going to be on the roster at whatever school. Do you have any sense of what your team's going to look like next year, and is there anything that you can sit here today and say like, I need to do this better going into next year?

DANA ALTMAN: I need to do a lot of things better. I've got to make better decisions on all the guys that we bring in. We've got to get some experience. I thought our lack of experience -- I think we played 15 or 16 Quad 1 games. You're not going to win Quad 1 games with inexperienced players. Other than Arizona, who's got two NBA freshmen. If you look at NBA freshmen, they're a lot different than regular freshmen.

So you take out the guys at the high end of that freshman class that are going to the NBA right away, the other freshmen struggle. So you've got to be experienced.

With the quality of games we had this year in the nonconference and the conference, you have to have a more experienced team. Whether it be Nate out with his ankles or Jackson out, the experience that we had were those two guys. Those were two All Big Ten team players. Nate was a defensive player last year that led the league in blocks. This year he just wasn't as bouncy. He sprained his right ankle early and then his left ankle in early January.

To his credit now, he fought his tail off to come back. He came back early on both of those. So I give him a lot of credit for that. But he wasn't the same player he was a year ago. He's got to get healthy and try to make a run here, get on an NBA team, but he's got to get healthy first with those ankles. He's got to get his bounce back, and the only way he does that is get fully healthy.

I'm so appreciative of the fact that he didn't leave us hanging. He fought his tail off. KJ, like I said, came every day. I think he missed one game or two, but he was there all year.

Q. Have you ever had a half like that in your career? What do you say at halftime to get them back? I mean, they were competitive in the second half.

DANA ALTMAN: I'm sure I have. You do this 46 years there are probably a couple. 3 for 22, I'm not sure about that. I just told them how disappointed I was in the fact that we were down 12 rebounds. I said, fellas, that just means they're playing so much harder. I know we missed shots, but we gave into it, and bad teams give into it.

When the shot's not falling, their energy level goes way down. I said, I don't think you guys are bad players, I don't think you're a bad team, but you got outworked there, and that's not what we do. So we're going to get on the boards. We're going to try to get it to 15 at the first TV timeout. We're going to try to get it to 10 at some point during the game, and see if we can make something happen.

Totally unacceptable to get out rebounded by 12. The shots didn't fall, like I said, mentally we weren't prepared, whatever. We didn't have any fire. We didn't have any bounce. That's on me as much as them. It's my job to get them ready to play, and we weren't ready to play.

But they did fight back at least, and I will give them credit for that.

Q. I'm wondering what kind of words you want to put there for Lin Wei's performance this season, and you just mentioned there's some changes on the roster for next season. Can you still see Lin Wei on the team for next season?

DANA ALTMAN: That's up to him. We'll meet after the season with all the players. Obviously things have got to change with all the players, not just Wei. There has to be a commitment to the team and coming back, working their tail off.

The adjustment's been hard for Wei with the language, the communication barrier. Then just the transition, it's a different game -- the physicality, the speed, the defensive requirements. College basketball is just a different game than what he's used to.

I've talked to a couple high school players from China, and they were glad they got to play high school basketball instead of just jumping right to college because of the change.

Wei's a wonderful young man. Takes care of his business. Goes to class. Works hard. I've got absolutely no complaints. He's just struggled this year. He puts a lot of pressure on himself to be good, and he gets frustrated when things don't go the way he wants them to, but you expect any good player -- good players want to play good. He just struggled making the adjustment.

I thought I'd have a lot of help with him and Jackson in the backcourt. Jackson can take a lot of the pressure off of

him with his experience and make some plays for him and that, and that wasn't able to happen because of Jackson's inability -- I mean, his injuries.

So a lot of pressure was put on Wei, and he just struggled with that, but we had a lot of guys struggle with that. Drew Carter struggled with the pressure, and TK with a negative assist-to-turnover ratio for a guard you can't have. Our guards just struggled a little bit without Jackson's leadership.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports