Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 13, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Wisconsin Badgers

Greg Gard

Nick Boyd

John Blackwell

Postgame Press Conference

Wisconsin - 91, Illinois - 88

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Wisconsin coach Greg Gard along with student-athletes Nick Boyd and John Blackwell.

GREG GARD: Obviously a tremendous college basketball game. I can't say enough about the heart and the toughness and the growth that my group has shown from back late in the fall into the 2026 part of the calendar and how we've matured and have tremendous toughness to us to be able to come back from 15 down. It speaks to the character of these guys and the willpower of them.

Illinois is a terrific team. Brad's got a terrific team. Both games have been overtime, and they've damn near been the same score. I think it was 91-89 at Champaign. So just two really, really good teams.

Obviously like yesterday, my backcourt is tremendous. These two guys were terrific, but their teammates also do a really good job of helping along the way with putting space on the floor and the rebounding and those type of things.

Obviously a tremendous team win. We'll get some rest and get ready for tomorrow afternoon.

Q. Nick, throughout the game, you were hyping up the Badger fans in attendance and proudly showing the Wisconsin name on your jersey. What does the fan base and team mean to you on a personal note?

NICK BOYD: Yeah I mean, that's what March is about, you know. Just bring all the fans together. It's just awesome to have them here. I had a great time, like you said, just getting them going. That's what I love to do. I'm all about community. When March comes around, usually the fan base pops out. We're just having fun.

Q. This is a question for both of you guys. It's very rare for a duo to score 30 points in a conference tournament game, so congratulations. What's one aspect of each other's game that helps elevate your game?

JOHN BLACKWELL: For me, I would say his aggressiveness getting downhill. He just opens up the floor for everybody. He sees the game. If their bodies are there, he's constantly kicking it out. Whether he has zero points and there's a minute left or he has 30, he's constantly staying aggressive trying to get to the paint.

NICK BOYD: Like he said, my aggressiveness, and I'm emotional out there, but I just love his poise in a situation, like he just stays poised and is very focused, and that rubs off on me.

I don't know, man, it took us some time -- now I know where he's going to be at at all times. As we keep growing together and get more and more games together, God willing, it's just going to keep being special.

Q. This is to both of you guys. There were six minutes in the first half where Illinois had a 21-3 run against you guys. In the timeout after that kind of run they had, what was going on in the team huddle that allowed you guys to turn it around like you did?

JOHN BLACKWELL: I think we were all just encouraging each other. He's more the emotional guy who hypes each other -- like we're telling the guys we're good, and I'm telling guys to calm down, relax.

The game is about runs. They're going to have their runs and we're going to have our runs. As long as we weather the storm, that was their punch, and we just keep punching back.

NICK BOYD: Yeah, like he said, just the way we're built. We could be down 20 and we can still come back. It's the

way we're built, how we can shoot and how spread the floor is and just our tempo.

I'm just telling him, I'm making sure in the huddle we're not pointing fingers. We're just staying together and encouraging each other to get one stop at a time. That's what we did. We chopped it down and down and down, and it broke loose.

Q. Nick, the first minute of the game, double tech, can you talk about that there, and what was exchanged with the head butt early on?

NICK BOYD: Just two competitive players out there on the court. Where I'm from, someone walk up on you, you've got to keep the same energy. It was nothing personal. He's a great player.

That's the type of stuff I love because that's how I grew up, and it gets me going.

Q. Nick, for you, what will it mean for you to on the game tomorrow, to go up against an old coach in Dusty May? You guys have a history before, a Final Four before. What has he meant to you in your college career? What would it mean for you to face him again with what's at stake tomorrow?

NICK BOYD: It's just an honor. He's a big reason why I'm in this position I am today, his mentorship and just showing me how to be a good human being. He set that example while I was with him for a couple years. I'm happy for him. He's come a long way. I seen him when he had zero championships, and I don't know how many he has now.

It's just awesome we get to square off again. When the ball goes in the air, may the best man win.

Q. John, you mentioned getting downhill, was that a big emphasis in the second half, especially with the way you guys were shooting the 3? Do you feel like that was what shifted this whole game in the second half?

JOHN BLACKWELL: Yeah, I think we did a great job of it at their place of just getting downhill, playing off two feet and kicking it out to shooters. So I think today they were running us off the line, and then we just found cracks, tried to get there, finish off two feet, and play poised in there.

Q. In the postseason, you're coming off back-to-back close emotional wins, and you're about to play your third game in three days. How do you rest, recover, and get ready to go again tomorrow?

NICK BOYD: Ain't no rest, you know what I'm saying? No rest. You've got to keep going. You get to play -- Michigan, right? No. 3 or No. 2 team in the country. By the time you get out there and the lights is bright, ain't nothing to think about.

You talk about rest? We'll play X amount of games, and you've got to come out fighting. If you're not excited and ready to go for a game like tomorrow, don't even lace 'em up.

JOHN BLACKWELL: If my dad is watching, happy birthday.

Q. Coach, how has this team evolved from the game at Nebraska when you guys took a hit, and you had some things to say about the team. How has it evolved since that time to the team that we're seeing now?

GREG GARD: I think it's a credit to them for how they recognized how we had to improve, and the improvement. There were things on the court, but there were probably as many things in our physical and mental makeup that we had to improve upon and grow through, and they've done that.

It's been a joy to watch them come together, the chemistry, the connectivity. It just took us time because it's a relatively new group. Seven of the top eight or nine are new to our program.

Like I said, it's just a credit to them for taking coaching, embracing the fact that we had to get better, and they took ownership in it. The results speak for themselves. They've done it. They answered the challenge. They followed the instructions of what the coaching staff put out in front of them of how we needed to get better and what it was going to entail, and they attacked it.

They've done a terrific job with it. Today's another example of just the perseverance and resilience that we didn't have back in late 2025 or early 2026, but they've grown immensely.

Q. Coach, you said it yourself, basically the same game as last time against Illinois. Same narrative too, you're down big late in the second half, forced overtime. What do you feel you were able to exploit in Illinois both times to get this same result, even though you're down big in the second half?

GREG GARD: I don't know if you exploit anything. It's two really, really good teams with terrific players. If you peel back the onion, so to speak, in terms of how they play and how we play, it's very identical. We both shoot a lot of 3s.

We're both analytically driven with rim 2s and 3s. We're both built to do that in terms of the makeup of our rosters.

Our guys were able to continue to find ways to make plays. I thought we rebounded the ball well, better than what we did yesterday, and that was a big piece because Illinois attacks the offensive glass exceptionally well. For us to be able to do it even down two guys from when we played in Champaign, it just speaks to, like I said, the internal fortitude of my group that they were able to find a way.

Like I said, Brad's got a great team. Hopefully they do really well in the tournament. I think they're built to do some damage. They're a hard cover. They're hard to guard because of how they spread you out. I'm sure we're hard to guard if I flip the mirror around the other way. Like I said, we're just able to make some plays on both ends of the floor to get the advantage down the stretch.

Q. You out rebounded one of the better rebounding teams in the nation. How did you approach the mentality and game plan coming into the game, particularly around the rebounding side against a much larger lineup?

GREG GARD: Rebounding, there's a point of it that's physical in terms of size and those things, but I felt a lot of rebounding is what's underneath your hood, meaning inside of you, and your grit and your toughness. You can rebound against size if you continue to have the fight to you and some toughness.

I thought, other than a couple times, I thought in the second half, down in front, we didn't check as hard as we needed to on a switch, and Ivisic got a putback. Buy and large, I thought we made their second opportunities relatively difficult. It's hard because they shoot a lot of 3s like we do, so you've got uncharacteristic bounces. You've got long rebounds coming out. It's not necessarily always a defensive rebounder's fault that we don't get the ball, it's just the angle and distance that the ball rebounds at.

But like I said, our pursuit of it I thought and our fight to make sure we minimize extra possessions, I think was exceptional.

Q. This is now six wins where you've trailed by double digits. Why has this team been able to do that?

GREG GARD: Thankfully it's a 40-minute game, so we have more time. I think a lot of it ties into what I've talked about here in terms of how our resilience and toughness and perseverance have grown. Our ability to turn the page within possessions, meaning something doesn't go well, we don't dwell on it. I've said all along they turn the page better than their head coach does at times. That happens from possession to possession, half to half, game to game.

They handle adversity much better than they did back in November, December, early January. It's a long game. We had 75 possessions today. If two or three in a row don't go your way, let's work to get it back in the next two or three knowing you've got a lot of time left to play.

With our pace of play and our ability to score -- I think in the game today just overall, the 3-point line, you can eradicate a lead or catch up or lose a lead in a short amount of time because the possessions can happen quick, and you bang in a few 3s.

Momentum's never neutral. It's either with you or against you. You're constantly fighting to have it on your side, and when you don't, you can't pout or dwell about things not going your way. This group has done a terrific job of growing into that identity.

Q. Outside of Boyd and Blackwell, the rest of the team today went 7 for 29. What's it going to take to get the rest of the offense going outside of those two guys?

GREG GARD: Hell, when your two guys score 69 of your 91 points. Look at Rapp, four assists, no turnovers. Bieliauskas four assists, no turnovers. There's eight buckets that they assisted on. Rapp and Carrington didn't shoot the ball particularly well from 3. I thought Bieliauskas turned down a few. We kept talking about he had some opportunities to pull the trigger on them.

When you have two guards like that and their ability to make plays and Nick has, what, six assists. So you ride the hot hand, you ride the game -- the game is a guard's game, especially this time of year. To be able to have two really, really good ones like we do, I'd be an idiot not to put the ball in their hands more often than not.

Q. You're one of two teams that have beaten Michigan this season. When you think back to that game, what has to go well for you guys tomorrow with this short turn?

GREG GARD: They're a terrific team. You've got to make shots. You've got to be able to guard. Mara is a handful. Lendeborg is a handful. You go up-and-down the list. Point guard Cadeau. They're well put together in terms of the pieces fit really well together, how they play off one another is exceptional. They can hurt you inside. They can shoot 3s. They make it hard because of how they defend, and Mara can take up a lot of space in the paint.

So you have to be -- I think we made 15, 16 3s in Ann

Arbor. We'll have to get our rest tonight and start diving through film. I know the assistants have been working ahead of that. And then get ready as we prep and rest up over the next, I don't know, 20 hours or so.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Friday, March 13, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Illinois Fighting Illini

Brad Underwood

Andrej Stojakovic

Keaton Wagler

Postgame Press Conference

Wisconsin - 91, Illinois - 88

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Illinois head coach Brad Underwood, along with student-athletes Andrej Stojakovic and Keaton Wagler.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Give Wisconsin a lot of credit, they were much better at staying consistent. It was a tale of two halves for us, especially on the defensive side. I thought we were very, very good in the first half. I thought we had great focus. We did something that we talked about, not giving them 2s.

The second half was just, for a team that leads the country in fewest fouls committed, when you parade somebody to the line and have a discrepancy like that, you're not going to win.

Let me make sure I get my numbers right. They shot 2 in the first half, then 18, and then 10. We're a team that draws a lot of fouls, and we weren't even close to those numbers. So you're not going to win when you put a team like that at the foul line.

Again, give them credit. Boyd was terrific. Literally just getting to the foul line 13 times. We had a nice 15-point lead in the second half. Then we got, I think, complacent. We got some good shots. We missed some open looks. They just chipped away.

Give them credit. Their two guards were terrific today. Obviously the difference in the game.

Q. This question is for Keaton. I just want to get your thoughts on this message from Coach after this loss, with the one-and-done season approach.

KEATON WAGLER: His message to us was this loss isn't the end for us. We've just got to learn from this. We've got to be focused on what wins games, which is defense and rebounding. We got out rebounded tonight. We can't let that happen if we want to win games.

So that was just the main message. He was like we've got to get back focused. We've got a week to prepare for the NCAA Tournament.

Q. For either of you guys, it feels like when the offense is firing, the energy is there on all sides of the court. How can you guys keep that energy during stagnant offensive periods?

ANDREJ STOJAKOVIC: Just keep sharing the ball. You're right, it does get stagnant at times during the game. We just have to keep trusting each other. This period is where we trust each other like no other, and we have to stay consistent in that. I think that's the number one thing.

Q. For either of you, you both had periods where it felt like you took over. Andrej in the first half, Keaton at times in the second half. Do you ever feel the need in those situations to just keep going? I know both of you pass it off a lot. Mirk had some 3's and opportunities. But do either of you feel maybe this should be my game and do it all?

KEATON WAGLER: I wouldn't say that really. We all trust each other, and if one of us is scoring the ball, we're going to keep looking for him. It's just different points of the game where you see what the defense is doing and see who they're taking away and what options we have.

It's not really just like an okay, I'm hitting shots. I'm going to keep shooting every shot. It's more about reading the defense and what they're giving us.

Q. Keaton, obviously you've carried a heavy minute load all season. You've battled through some nagging injuries over the last couple weeks. Where do you feel you are physically now after a 32-game regular season

as you go into the tournament?

KEATON WAGLER: I think that I'm as good as I can feel right now. Today in the game I was feeling fine. I wasn't really tired at all.

What's good about -- it's never good to lose, but with this loss, we have a whole week, like I said earlier to prepare to get our legs feeling good, get our bodies feeling good for the tournament. I'm feeling just ready to go. That's what I would say.

Q. Fourth overtime game this year, losing all four. Do you feel like this prepares you in a way for the NCAA to have those overtime games and the pressure of that throughout the season?

ANDREJ STOJAKOVIC: Any loss stings, but when it comes in overtime, and it happens a few times like you mentioned, all we can do is learn from it. There's nothing we take away from this game and not apply and try to fix the mistakes that we made. All we can do is move on and apply the lessons from this game and move forward.

KEATON WAGLER: He said it really well. Just keep learning from these games, and just know for us, like when we let a team get out early, get a lead early, it's hard to come back in a short period of time. It just comes down to our defense getting stops, finishing out the possession with a rebound, and then just staying focused on our offensive game plan.

Q. We saw you nodding there with that question about the stagnant offense. What do you feel like changes when you guys are firing and there's energy and then shots aren't going down and it seems like energy is not there is what you're thinking?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I'm not worried about the offense. I'm worried about what it does on the other end. We've got the Number 1 offense in college basketball, and we got really good shots again today.

Sometimes I think, when we make shots, we get casual on the other end, and we think it's just easy. I had that feeling today. Then all of a sudden they get going, and now it's a shootout. I don't want shootouts.

Again, give them credit. They did what they had to do, which was get to the foul line, but I do think that we've got to -- you know, Kylan Boswell is a senior. We talked about not giving reject ball screens to John Blackwell, and first or second play of the second half, he gives up a reject ball screen. That's stuff we didn't do one time in the first half. Those are the mental lapses and mental mistakes that are just driving me nuts. That's the consistency with which we struggled with today.

Q. In the first overtime game against Wisconsin in Champaign, Boyd and Blackwell combined for 49 to help push them over the line. What about their games make them so difficult to guard in tight games like they did today?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: They both get fouled a ton. They're both two of the top guys, so you've got to try to guard them without fouling them. Then they're both guys that are very adept at 3-point shooters.

Now, Boyd is -- I think he's shooting 17 percent off the bounce from 3, and Blackwell is shooting 28 percent off the bounce from 3. But they do a great job of their bigs. Bieliauskas especially, Bieliauskas is a hidden gem for them. He's very smart and sets ball screens, and he sets them at angles that force it that it's hard to go under. When they get in those middle ball screens, both of those guys are very effective.

Very difficult to guard, both great finishers.

Q. What were the key points from this game that will help this team going into the NCAA Tournament later on in the month?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: You get out rebounded, you go home. If we're not consistent on the defensive side, we'll go home. Again, offensively we've been gifted, and we are. The other night we didn't shoot the ball very well, and maybe it's the United Center. We lost a game to Alabama here when we didn't make free throws either. For a team that's top 10 in the country in free throw rate, that's frustrating.

Again, you got to do all the little things to win. That's it. It's the rebounding. It's the defensive consistency. And we didn't have that today.

Q. Obviously your offense has been predicated on offensive rebounding, but this is the second game against Wisconsin this year where you didn't get back 30 percent of your misses. What's the Kryptonite from an offensive standpoint from this Wisconsin team?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: They do a great job of blocking out. Their guards are good. I'll have to ask Greg after the year why they're so good at it.

I don't know, our effort has to be better. I think we put Ben in. Ben got a couple early in the first half. And our

offensive rebound effort is as -- no matter how much we work on it in practice, somehow it's not carrying over right now.

It was -- Mirk had three, which was good, and Ben had two, which we had early. There's zeros pretty much by everybody else. We've got to get other guys on the glass rebounding. We've got to get Dre there. We've got to get Jake there. We've got to get Keaton there. Kylan's got to get there. It's got to be a collective group.

Q. Brad, you kind of laid it out, but do you feel like this is an effort issue on defense or an Xs and Os issue when you hold them to 10 for 41 from 3 and they still score 91?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I think we're playing really hard. I think we're trying. I think we're playing really, really hard. I think that a guard like Boyd is hard to handle. When he gets fouled at a high rate -- again, he's downhill. You can do many different things in coverage, and again, we did a better job on him in the first game, and they kick it to bigs for 3s. It's kind of pick your poison.

I didn't think we won the point of attack very well. Kylan played in foul trouble all night, was for the most part a non-participant, even though he did play very well in his minutes. But we need his tenacity defensively.

Again, it takes everybody. I thought the first half we were -- couldn't have had a better game plan, and somehow the second half, we just got away from it.

Q. How challenging has it been to get the chemistry right with this group? You're playing well when Kylan was in early in the season. You played well when he was out. Now he's back. It's a good thing, but you've still got to pick the right lineup at the right time and get it all working.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I'm not lying, it's hard. It's not easy. We've had a lot of those challenges this year from first semester all through. This is very similar to our elite 8 season, when we were without Terrance for a while and getting him back. He stunk when he got back. He wasn't very good right away. It takes a little while to find that.

We've been starting Jake and bringing Dre off the bench. There were some positives to that, some negatives. It's just I like our group a lot. I think we've got great, great team chemistry. Some of that is we've got to find that on the court as well.

Q. Brad, you're 4 of 5 out of your last nine games. Four losses in overtime, all to really good teams that are going to be playing next week and maybe beyond. What kind of message do you take to your team? Is it back off, loosen up, everything's fine? Or is it ramp up the pressure, we need to be tighter in certain areas? What's kind of the message, and how do you think you can help your team move past this?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I think it's that message. It's what you said. We're really good. We've lost some -- we're a possession away in a lot of games from being one of the best teams record-wise in the country. I still think we're one of the best teams in the country.

Yet you've got to find somebody to make those shots, get that stop, and it's not a combination of a lot of things. It's a combination of a very few small things that maybe a player steps up and hits a shot and that flips. Maybe we make free throws when the pressure is on the game, we get a defensive rebound. It's one thing.

They're trying really, really hard. I thought we played loose today. I thought we played competitive. That's how we've got to stay, competitive. This group likes to be loose. I thought they were very, very loose, to a point where they're too loose. We've got to stay focused, especially when the game comes easy for us on the offensive end.

Q. Hey, Brad, kind of similar. I wasn't there, and I don't know what went into it. A few days ago you were asked about close games and you said you didn't appreciate the topic. I was wondering if you could elaborate. What's the right way or the fair way to look at --

BRAD UNDERWOOD: We won a lot of close games. You want to win the Purdue game? You want to win -- you start looking and go right down the list. It's not a narrative one way or the other. We own the fact that we've gotten beat in those, but we've also won a lot of close ones. We've also had guys make a lot of very good plays.

Is this a story if you get beat 20? It's not. It's because they're one-possession games. I have to do better. I have to help them in those moments. But I think it's more of one possession type situation that we have to understand that we can't take any possession off. I think that's what I'm trying to get this group to understand. It's one rebound.

You can't be lazy mentally and not block out. John Blackwell gets a rebound with no blockout at the end of the game. If we get it, we win. If we get a rebound in the Michigan State game in East Lansing, we win. If we get a stop against -- and a rebound against UCLA, we win.

But before that, Keaton made the shot at UCLA. If we get

the stop, then Keaton's the story. I don't like narratives. I like figuring out how to solve the problems, and that's what we've got to do. It's just one possession here or there. That's what this group has to understand. Today I thought it was just a lack of focus.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports