Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Saturday, March 14, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Michigan Wolverines

Dusty May

Elliot Cadeau

Yaxel Lendeborg

Postgame Press Conference

Michigan - 68, Wisconsin - 65

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Michigan head coach Dusty May along with student-athletes Elliot Cadeau and Yaxel Lendeborg.

DUSTY MAY: What a fabulous basketball game, kind of a modern Big Ten game where teams were fighting, clawing, scrapping, competing at the highest level, but also making some high level shots and plays.

Very, very proud of our guys. When you see them make the big shots that they made tonight, you just think back to how much work they put in in the gym after practice, before practice, in the mornings, whatever the case, on the weekends, and the game rewards that behavior. These guys deserved -- I feel like both of them hit game-winning shots. They deserved that because of what they've done up to this point.

Q. Yax, speak on the game-winning shot, and what was the call, and what led to it? Was this the first game-winning shot of your career?

YAXEL LENDEBORG: This is my first game winner. I've hit a couple of game tie-rs in overtime. The play call was for me to get the ball down low in the post. I didn't do a good job sealing. AC had a driving angle. I tried to clear it out for him, and he kept his composure. Didn't force up a bad shot, made the one more to the open guy, and I happened to be there to make the shot.

Q. You mentioned keeping your composure in those final few minutes when Wisconsin was going on the onslaught to get back in the game. How did you both keep calm, continue to generate good looks, and get stops?

YAXEL LENDEBORG: We know we're a pretty good team. We had some guys just hyping each other up a little bit, getting rowdy, but it's all in the love of the game. We haven't had many opportunities or games like this where we felt that kind of game pressure.

This is all like a learning point for us. We're going to do a lot better next game or whenever it happens again to take advantage of that moment and punching them right back in the mouth instead of taking a couple hits and a couple hits.

Q. For both of you guys, what makes Wisconsin's drive and kick game so hard to defend?

ELLIOT CADEAU: I just think their guards are really good. They could get downhill pretty much at will. They're just really fast. Once they get downhill, they're good passers, and they have a lot of shooters surrounding them. That's kind of what makes their offense good.

Q. For Elliot, there was a critical 3 you hit, well, you took the first one wide open, went out. Then you took another one 5, 10 seconds later that went in, and huge shot. Have you always been wired that, even when you miss a shot, you have the self-confidence to deliver one a few seconds later?

ELLIOT CADEAU: Yeah, I feel like the past probably two years of my life I haven't been wired like that, but thanks to my coaching staff, I'm now wired like that. I was wired like that in high school. So them just giving me confidence, my teammates giving me confidence to just shoot it again even if I miss, they don't care if I miss again.

Q. You guys had really great rim protection today. Aday had five blocks, you had one, Morez had two. Can you talk about the rim protection particularly and again as they were having the onslaught with the 3s, right as they started going back inside, it was hard to get that momentum going because that rim protection?

YAXEL LENDEBORG: I think Aday has the best rim

protection I've ever seen in my life. He does a really good job walling up, blocking the shot. All year we've really been relying on him down there. A lot of us play aggressive defense, and we were allowing him to have our back, and he has been. Him doing that and doing it on the other side of the floor too is really what led to this win honestly. He kept us in it when we were down.

Q. Elliot, you guys haven't been through a game like that. You're down with foul trouble early, up by 15, down by 4 with just a few minutes left. Going through those ebbs and flows, that being new, is that something that maybe was good to experience before the tournament?

ELLIOT CADEAU: Yeah, that was definitely a new situation, but we've definitely been in situations where we've been up and teams went on crazy runs. Like at Michigan State that happened, and that was on the road. We've kind of been in positions sort of like that already. We know just to keep our head low -- stay level headed, and we know just to keep our composure in those moments.

Q. What has this year been to you as far as the success that you've had individually, collectively with this team, hitting your first game winner, and now you're on the brink of a championship postseason. What has this year meant to you?

YAXEL LENDEBORG: This has been the best year of my life honestly. I've had so much fun. I've had a lot of learning points as well. There's been times where I had a really bad game that I couldn't really get out of my head. Today, for example, I was really down on myself first half because I felt like I was letting my team down.

Coach was really letting me know he has my back regardless. He wants me to be more aggressive. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work.

Just how much I've learned this year in general has really helped me out and is really molding me to be better in the future no matter what I'm doing in my life. So I'm really grateful that I made the decision to come here and get coached by Coach Dusty.

Q. For either or both players, what's it like to be on the other side when someone gets as hot as that guy was in the second half?

ELLIOT CADEAU: I don't really know how to feel about it. They're just really good players. We can't call it like luck or anything because the same players, the same two players did that to us last game. It's kind of something that we kind of expected them to do because they did it last game. It was just like a feeling like we've got to close out better, like take away the attempt.

YAXEL LENDEBORG: For me I would say it's very frustrating. We play super hard defense, and then he gets open for a split second, makes one, and now all of a sudden he made six. It's like what are we doing right now? What happened? You just feel helpless. I feel hopeless honestly. I'm trying to find where he is, I can't find him, and next thing you know he's shooting a wide open 3. It's definitely a bad feeling.

Q. Other than Elliot being on the floor most of the half, what was working better in the second half? Offense seemed to flow much better.

DUSTY MAY: That and then Yax was much more aggressive. Then we started getting Aday into the post, and then he got going, and then we felt like we were getting a little bit static. They did a good job of digging and getting it out of there. So a combination of all those things.

This was a game, I think, we've talked about being in close games, well, we haven't been in a close game like this all year where there was a lot of friction in our huddles. The emotion was pouring out late in the game because there were such extreme runs. There's always runs. These were extreme runs.

I was proud of our guys. They were able to regulate their emotions, get back together, and figure out a way to win. When you get this late in the season, you've got to figure out some different ways. Rapp, what a performance. Same thing with Bieliauskas. Those guys, they give Carrington and Boyd and Blackwell and Rohde, they give those guys a lot of room because of their unique skills.

It's a well put together roster. They have a good team. I think Rapp was probably all league out on the West Coast. Bieliauskas is playing at the highest level in Europe for a great club. Then obviously Coach Nick Boyd, I've seen him do that a lot. I almost feel like I was holding him back a little bit for as well as he's playing now.

Very proud of him. The dude, he elevates the level of work whatever room he goes in. He has passion for the game, his passion to compete is second to none. For our guys to match that and find a way to win here on a neutral site, very, very proud of our guys.

Q. Dusty, we've talked about Michigan is a tough matchup for Ohio State. Is Wisconsin a tough matchup for Michigan in terms of what they do? They beat you once in the regular season, and this came

down to the wire, or is it just they're doggone good?

DUSTY MAY: When you have Nick Boyd and John Blackwell, you're a tough matchup for 364 teams in the country, you're a tough matchup. We were disappointed because I thought our game plan was much better than it was in Game 1. The game plan and the execution and the contingency plans. But we let them get to their strengths, rejecting the corner ball screens. They rejected three, and they made us pay for all three of them.

We felt like our mistakes, even though we held them to 28 in the first half, they had about 15 on our mistakes, on our errors. We had a rebound in our hands, they knock it out they get a 3-pointer. We still have a long way to go, but luckily we can really sit out and guard. Being so process oriented, I literally thought we did a really good job of guarding and Rapp was hitting out of the world shots.

The one that was disappointing, was we got a late clock, and they literally bowling passed it across the court. It was a two-side, we had two defender in that area. I don't know if they took their eye off the ball or relaxed, for them to get a 3 and that really super charged them, and after that he made some big, big shots.

It's like our roster. It all just fits well together.

Q. Dusty, you mentioned experience and some things your team hadn't experienced, friction in the huddle, stuff like that. Did you learn anything about your team that you didn't know today?

DUSTY MAY: Yes, absolutely. I'd rather keep some of that in house, but I liked it. We don't ever make it personal. We've talked about it since day one, and when we say it all fits, typically what fits isn't this guy's a shooter, this guy is a driver, this guy can score in the post, whatever the case. It's more how their personalities fit. If they don't, how do we make them fit and understand each other from the other's perspective?

Our guys, we haven't been in this moment, so we haven't seen that come out, and I thought it was really, really healthy because it was constructive, there was thought and intent behind it, and none of it was selfish. None of it was about myself. It was about what this team needs to do to win.

Trust me, like I, we, the staff, we need help from our players. They're in the battle. So when they come over and say, hey, they're doing this, this, and this, Coach, can we look at this? Absolutely. We're going to empower them to make those decisions and think like coaches on the floor because, when they're in it, they're able to contribute more than I think people give them credit for.

Q. Following up on that, how good was it for you guys to have a game like this before you go into the tournament? Also, Yax mentioned that you said something to him at halftime. What did you say? What was that conversation like? How much did you feel you needed to have that conversation with him?

DUSTY MAY: Actually, the staff encouraged me and gave me a couple bullet points, and then I said them in my own words with my own delivery. The gist was that, look, we're big boys here. We can live with whatever the results are, but we're not going out like that. We're going to be aggressive. We're going to be afraid of failure. We're going to let it rip, being us.

If it's not good enough, we'll get on the bus tonight and go back home and start preparing for the NCAA Tournament and then draw tomorrow. Either way, we can live with the results. We're not going to let results, the Twitter, how much guys make, and all this other stuff, affect us going after something together and doing all the difficult stuff together and getting all that clouded by what's really important, and that's what they're learning right now and their journey and their process to become the absolute best versions of themselves.

When they walk out the doors, some of them very soon, hopefully a month or so, that they're ready to make it in the real world and be productive citizens.

Q. You had pretty much a full 29.5 seconds to figure out what you wanted to do on that last possession. You chose no timeout, had him come up the court. What exactly -- were you trying to get that shot, or was it just working around and see what you can get?

DUSTY MAY: We had a play. We didn't execute it. Credit Wisconsin. We thought Yax had a matchup in the post. He went to it, and then we had a timeout, and at 3.8 I looked, and I did a quick scan. I thought Elliot Cadeau, the floor's busted, they're out of their shell, they're scrambling, I think he's going to make something good happen. That was it.

It was a split second, take a quick scan of what's going on, timeout, are we going to be able to squeeze something good? Typically when the game gets like that, if you have really good players and guys that know how to play, they find something better than you can organize against a set, on balance, physical defense like Wisconsin.

Q. You are on the brink of doing something that the conference hasn't seen since 2017-2018, and that's a

repeat champion in the Big Ten tournament, which happened to be John Beilein's Michigan Wolverines.

DUSTY MAY: That wasn't that long ago. That's just a couple years ago.

Q. What does that mean to you, that you're on the verge of making your own history for this program?

DUSTY MAY: It means we're going to go out there and watch this game and scout the best we can and come out here and compete together as well as we can for 40 minutes tomorrow, and just know we have some guys that will step up -- Will Tschetter I thought in the first half really held it in the road for us tonight. These guys come in and take some of his shine. When we do well, it doesn't take the shine off of anybody else. When he plays well, it doesn't take the shine off of him.

Will sacrificed a lot. His energy, he made a big shot, but his life -- same thing. I thought we were on the verge of getting down big when we were down eight in the first half and they were rolling. We were trying to get to halftime without being in much more foul trouble.

Those contributions, that's what we're looking for. Whether it's Nimari, Roddy, Trey, whatever, we know someone is going to have a big game, it's going to be their moment, and everybody else is going to embrace that and be just as happy for them as they would be themselves.

Q. You mentioned the last few weeks about not getting into early foul trouble, and if they do, how do they respond for that? Elliot had two early fouls, sat out most of the first half. He had a really big second half, as you mentioned, even in that last play. Can you talk about what he did to rebound in that capacity in the second half, and what his presence on the floor looks like when he can stay out of foul trouble and make those big plays happen?

DUSTY MAY: When he's in neutral, he's an elite process and thinker. Because he's so competitive, sometimes a jersey grab, a push gets him out of his stuff. We're just trying to get him to in that moment just freeze, take a deep breath, and get recentered because that usually carries -- like the foul, we thought there was a play that happened before. He responds to the foul, grabs his jersey, and now it's two.

Just trying to get him to where we're not responding to a missed call, something we think that happened. He's too important to our team, and he's especially important now with L.J. out. Once again, what an opportunity for Trey McKenney to play point for 10 minutes in the first half. Those minutes are invaluable. We'll lean on that again.

This is very, very healthy for us to be where we are right now, still finding some things out about ourselves and discovering new ways to win.

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Wisconsin Badgers

Greg Gard

John Blackwell

Nick Boyd

Austin Rapp

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THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Wisconsin head coach Greg Gard as well as student-athletes Nick Boyd, Austin Rapp, and John Blackwell.

GREG GARD: Obviously a heck of a comeback by our guys there in the second half to a terrific team. Both of our games with them have been great games and terrific battles.

Obviously we're extremely proud of our guys of how we couldn't get shots to go in for the latter most of the game, and then we got a rhythm going. Extremely proud of them and how we played this week here. This will be good for us because now we'll get healthy, get some rest, and get ready for next week.

This group is battle tested, and I think hungry to make a deep run. We know we start with one game, but like I said, couldn't be prouder of how this group has grown together over this season, and we've turned into one of the better teams in the country.

Q. Austin, I wanted to ask you about the run. You had six 3-pointers, five of them in a row. At some point does it look like the basket is the size of the ocean? What's kind of going through your mind when you start hitting -- after you hit a couple of them and you're still open? No matter if it's a transition or a set or whatever.

AUSTIN RAPP: I started off a little slow, missed a couple of easy ones in the first half that I should normally knock down. Came in at halftime, and Coach did a good job of making sure me and Carrington, like keep letting them fly. When we're open, keep shooting.

I came out and air balled my first three that I shot in the second half. I knew I was good from there. I don't air ball very often. That next shot went down, and I made a couple after that. Then yeah, it felt like I was throwing it into the ocean by the end of it. It was kind of cool.

Q. Austin, just kind of building off of that, is there something that clicks for you that allows you to -- was there any moment where you were like, oh, I kind of -- oh, I feel this right now, or is it just an accumulation when you get going like that?

AUSTIN RAPP: I trust myself that I put the work in. I trust my work. I've been a pretty good shooter my whole life. When I see a couple that don't go in, I kind of try to bounce back and know how good of a shooter I am and keep letting it fly.

My point guard and JB do a really good job of making sure, when I'm hot, they find me. They found me like five times in a row going in.

Q. Nick and John, what was it like to watch Austin do that? It seemed like, like he said, throwing in the ocean.

JOHN BLACKWELL: Proud of him for that because, when he's shooting like that, it's because his defense, it's because he's playing defense, he's active everywhere. That's what gets him going.

I think he's matured and figured that out, and I'm proud of him. It's only going to carry over to the tournament.

NICK BOYD: Like he said, just a breath of fresh air to see him knock them shots down and kind of pick the team up, give us a jolt in a tough stretch.

I see him working on his shot every morning, so it's just good to see it pay off.

Q. Nick and John, you guys hoisted a lot of shots the last couple days. You played into overtime. Did you feel that at all on your legs today? Did you feel any wear and tear on your legs from playing the last couple days?

NICK BOYD: Not really. Playing a game. I had a lot of fun out there just hooping. Got to be better. That's it. The.

JOHN BLACKWELL: For me, just a little bit. I got hit in my knee, and my contact fell out. It's basketball. It's March. It's part of basketball, and we're just going to fight and leave it all out there.

I told the guys when we were down, I said, we're not going to go out without a fight. We're going to go out swinging. And I said that to Aussie, that was the last one I said it to, and he did what he did right after that.

Q. Austin, how do you think your growth as a player over the course of the season reflects how you all are growing as the season's gone on?

AUSTIN RAPP: I think we've all grown to be honest with you. I wouldn't say there's a single person on the roster that hasn't grown. Will Garlock came in this time and played great minutes. Hayden Jones came in and and played great minutes. We've got guys that are stepping up with Nolan and JJ out. We've got guys that are stepping up -- Hayden is just a freshman. Aleksas is just a freshman. We had a lot of growth this year.

Even with these two, we know that they were talented coming in this year, but they've grown so much. It's because of the work they put in outside of practice. They're in the gym every day. They've got workouts in the morning, workouts after practice. It shows this team works really hard off the court, and it's starting to show we can compete with anyone in the country, and we've shown that.

Q. Nick, I think you had four steals pretty quickly there. Where do you feel like you've grown the most defensively this year?

NICK BOYD: I would probably just say just our connection on the defensive end just growing has rubbed off as a team. Man, just my plan today was just to go out there and lay it on the line, whatever that looks like. For me, it's not really about wins or losses, it's more about respect.

I think we did a good job earning some respect around the country, and it's a blessing to play in March. Not everybody gets to do this. Got people biting their fingernails and stressing right now trying to get into this tournament. It's a breath of fresh air to sit back, relax, rest up, and make a good run in March.

Q. Greg, it looked like Yaxel had been pretty quiet through basically a game and a half. At the end of the first half today, he gets a 3 and really starts to assert himself in the second half. How difficult of a guard is he when he's taking the ball and being aggressive in terms of getting the shot?

GREG GARD: He's a complete player at 6'9'. So you've got a guy that can put the ball on the floor. They can try to post him. He can shoot the 3. They move him around, put him in some gap driving at times. He can ball screen. They can ball screen for him.

Like I said, the skill set is one thing, but when you combine that with his size, it obviously makes it a very unique matchup. I thought for the most part our guys, we didn't give anything easy. The 3 he got at the end of the first half that we over extended out top and got caught too high and allowed the top to corner pass to become too easy, and it slowed our rotation where we couldn't rotate fast enough.

But he's a really good player obviously, but that's not the only guy they have. They have a lot of really good players. Yeah, he's a unique matchup because of the size and his versatility.

Q. Obviously Aleksas and especially Aussie really had that 3-point shot going at different times. What stands out to you most about what they did? Obviously, again, without Nolan.

GREG GARD: I think both of those guys, you talked about the growth, somebody asked about the growth, those two guys have grown as much as anybody on the team. For Austin to have a really rough start, and as he mentioned, air ball the one. I think I looked at one point and he was 0 for 7 or 1 for 6 or whatever, and then he got going. So the confidence to keep shooting.

That's one thing we try to embed in these guys is just, yeah, you've got to keep shooting. You've got to stay with your confidence. I even thought we turned some down at times. Mara blocked a couple and got some hands on it.

I don't want them gun shy. I don't want them overthinking it and becoming hesitant because obviously when we are spraying 3s, it opens up so much more, and then the guards can get downhill. It plays into the overall plan.

Q. How likely did the jump that Austin made seem at the start of the year with how he started the year?

GREG GARD: The jump Austin's made? Tremendous. I think JB touched on it. It's not just the 3-point shooting. Everybody gets caught up, and that's what everybody looks at and talks about, it's the other parts of his game that have grown -- the defensive awareness, the embracing of physicality, the embracing and the importance of rebounding. All the things that have nothing to do with shooting have improved, which have helped make him a better shooter and a more confident player.

His growth, like I said, has been terrific, and that's a credit to him to stay true to it. He started early in the year, and he wasn't ready for that. I thought we needed to make a change. He's taken that and used that to his advantage and grown his game and improved immensely as a player.

Q. Coach Gard, can you speak a little bit about how your team kind of poses a unique threat to Michigan as far as like the pick and pop game and just making those big guys kind of stretch away from the cup, which they've been able to do really well, but you guys seem to be making them the most uncomfortable of any team.

GREG GARD: I think we probably make a lot of teams uncomfortable because of that attribute to our team. We've been doing that for -- we do it in a little different way now, but we've been doing that at Wisconsin for 25 years, different system within what we do within the swing.

But we had bigs that shot it and shot it really well. We just get them in a different way. There's more ball screens. Obviously the spacing has changed a little bit, but in terms of having bigs that shoot, we've been known for that around the country. If you're a big that can shoot, Wisconsin's a good place to go because we're going to let you let 'em fly.

Q. Nick mentioned the connectivity on defense. It feels like that, especially with the guards, has really grown over the last month or two. Rohde is a guy whose hands have been really critical for this defense. Can you talk about that connectivity and just how important it is for Rohde's role with that defense and how he's played the last few weeks?

GREG GARD: Yeah, it's a piece of the growth of this team that started back in the summer. You look at 7 of the 8 guys that played tonight or today weren't here last year. So the newness of everybody coming together, it takes a little time, more time than probably I would have liked. I'm a little impatient in that regard, but the connectivity is a part of that.

You have to go through some adversity. You have to figure out what doesn't work and how much better you need to do things, how much harder you need to play. I don't think we had a great vision or understanding of how hard we had to play earlier in the year. We did in stretches, but we didn't do it consistently. We're doing it consistently now.

Obviously when you play hard, you're never going to play perfect, but if you play hard, you can cover up for a lot of imperfections and make up for things. This group has understood and embraced how playing hard is to our benefit.

Q. You kind of alluded to this earlier, but what would you say you guys have learned over the last couple times in terms of in the games here that you can apply forward as you get ready for the NCAA Tournament?

GREG GARD: Obviously you always come into these things to win, and I get asked about that a lot, right? When they're keeping score and there's a trophy at the end of the road, it's all guns blazing towards it.

But I think the benefits coming out of this, obviously our younger players because we're playing without two, our starter and rotational guy in Janicki and Winter, so some of our younger guys have gotten a little more experience in brighter lights than they would have normally got.

Same thing for a guy like Austin Rapp. Now he started X number of games since Nolan's been out. Those experiences all pay dividends. Aleksas Bieliauskas has had to carry a bigger load up front. That's going to carry dividends going forward into next week and for his career. It's not just a small snapshot. You're looking at how this can benefit younger players going forward.

I think this group understands how good they are, but you get to this point and time of the year, they're all good. No matter who we play next week and where we get sent, we're going to play a really good team. So just understanding and keeping in mind what makes us good and stay true to that and do it better and keep getting better.

That's what I said a week ago when we won at Purdue, this group has gotten better. I think we can still get better. This was a good 'nother step for certain guys to continue to improve and get more confidence, and ultimately it makes the team better.

Q. You've mentioned past seasons about how teams playing on Championship Sunday shouldn't play Thursday in the NCAA Tournament. How does this extra day of recovery, rest, preparation kind of help

you guys moving forward?

GREG GARD: If we would have won, it didn't matter, right? It is what it is. Whether you play Thursday or you play a Friday wherever you get sent, I assume we won't be in a play-in game in Dayton. I think we've accomplished quite a bit to be above that line.

You want to be playing tomorrow, but at the same time, yeah, we have to use it to our advantage. So we've obviously played on Sunday the last two years in this tournament. It had an effect. I'm not going to be naive enough to think that it didn't. Four games in four days takes a toll. But again, you balance that drive to compete and win, but we know the big fish is coming now.

These guys are ready for it. I think the buildup to this, the growth they've shown getting in this environment is good. Getting some experience for guys that normally wouldn't play as much had we been completely healthy, it all will pay dividends if we use it and point it in the right direction and know we've got to get back, rest, get healthy, and get ready to attack wherever we get sent and whoever we have.

Q. Nick mentioned the idea of you guys getting a lot of respect over this last run. What does respect mean at this time of year?

GREG GARD: I think Wisconsin's never been one that gets a lot of bells and whistles. We're a blue collar -- I've seen this program grow immensely and evolve and stay so consistent, and I think that's one thing that gets overlooked. There's flashes in the pans in programs. Around the country you see it. They'll have a blip on the radar.

But for this program to stay so consistent over 25 years -- and it doesn't mean you're going to play in the tournament every year, but the culture and the way we go about things, I think the players that come here have a great experience.

So we don't get maybe the complete -- we have to earn it, and that's okay. That's okay. We have to earn the respect. I thought Boyd and Blackwell maybe should have been a little higher on the All Conference list, but this league has as much talent as it's ever had in my 25 years. Part of it's the 18 teams, but the depth of the talent across the board, this league hasn't seen anything like it.

Just got to keep -- respect is least. I'm going to pull a little quote from JJ Watt. It's about respect. You can look it up. But rent's due every day. So we've got to continue to pay rent to continue to play well. Your play will get you your respect.

I think internally within the basketball communities across the country, Wisconsin is extremely respected, and you go back to Coach Bennett, you go to Coach Ryan, the foundation of the program and what those guys did, but you have to continue to earn that. Sometimes we don't get the attention maybe, that that's what he was talking about, but that's okay. We'll earn it, and we have to go prove it on the court when the scoreboard is running.

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