Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Northwestern Wildcats

Chris Collins

Jayden Reid

Nick Martinelli

Postgame Press Conference

Northwestern - 76, Penn State - 66

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by head coach Chris Collins and student-athletes Nick Martinelli and Jayden Reid of the Northwestern Wildcats. Northwestern advances to take on 10 seeded Indiana tomorrow at 5:30 p.m. in the first game of our night session.

CHRIS COLLINS: Really proud of these guys. I thought the first half it was like two teams feeling each other out, kind of going back and forth. We would throw a couple punches. They would come back and hit us a little bit.

They were really hurting us in the paint the first half, I thought really spreading us. Our hand activity, our rotations weren't great. Their big kid had 12 of the first 16 points.

But I thought in the second half really challenged these guys to be more active on the defensive end of the floor. We had to be more active with our hand activity. We had to do a better job of sealing angles on their drives. They were really trying to spread us and drive us, and we got some turnovers which got us out on the open floor which helped us get some easy baskets.

Then I thought we check executed well in the second half. They were doing a lot of switching, kind of scrambling the game a little bit. Jayden did well managing 9 assists. Jake 5 assists. Had kind of opportunistic - Justin Mullins hit a couple of 3s. Nick's going to do what he does.

This was a really good team win. We knew we were going to have a battle tonight. Excited about the opportunity to continue to play. I hope you can see by watching our play we're here, we want to compete, we want to keep playing, and we're excited about having the opportunity to play Indiana tomorrow night.

Q. Nick, how important is it for you to be able to keep going, keep fighting with your team tomorrow?

NICK MARTINELLI: Obviously I was super nervous before this game knowing that it could be the last time. Yeah, that senior urgency really hit different today. I'm just happy we fought and came out with the win.

Q. For either of you, Coach talked about how you struggle in the paint at first. How did Tyler Kropp's energy help you guys battle back?

NICK MARTINELLI: I thought he did a great job on the glass the first half. Came in with a ton of energy. The other team's big guy, credit to him, he's a tough kid. Tyler matched his energy and did a great job.

Q. Nick, this is the second game you've had to play without AP. What has it been like for you having to take a larger role on the glass on defense and stepping up for him?

NICK MARTINELLI: As we say, it's next man up. I thought Kropp, like I said before, he did a great job when he came in. It doesn't matter who you're guarding and what space you're in, you just have to do the job and get the job done.

All these guys are moving around, guarding different guys, switching, talking. We have to all be connected as one to get a win like that. I thought we did that today.

Q. Nick, what do you think about the freshmen coming out today?

CHRIS COLLINS: Our freshmen.

NICK MARTINELLI: I've said it before, we have stud freshmen. I thought Tre in the second half really came alive, and it was because of this guy to my right, Jake getting them the ball in good positions. Jake has been money for us. He's so solid. He plays like a senior, like a

veteran. Those guys are going to have a great future.

Q. Nick, you had a 10-minute stretch between the 14-minute mark and the 4-minute mark in the second half where you didn't score at all, but it was sort of the key stretch for the team pulling ahead to about 10. How nice was it to see your teammates kind of carry the load there when it's often been you throughout this season?

NICK MARTINELLI: It was great. I thought they did a great job, as I said, in that stretch. Tre was really getting to the basket and being aggressive, JR spitting out to shooters. We had a ton of guys step up today. It was great to see.

Q. Jayden, you and Jake both got the start tonight. You were both on the floor for large stretches at a time. Having two point guards out on the floor, how does that help you guys, whether that's in transition or setting up the offense?

JAYDEN REID: I love playing with Jake. Obviously both of us could play on the ball, off the ball. We could guard both the 1 and 2. It doesn't matter who gets it. We both push the ball. I feel like it helps our transition. Honestly our connection off the court translates to on the court, and we have good chemistry out there.

Q. Jayden, you had 14 points, 9 assists, as a team 21 assists on 27 baskets, I think it was. What was clicking for you guys offensively today?

JAYDEN REID: Just being unselfish, just taking the right shots. Obviously all of us have confidence to make the shots and take the right shots. Coach preached before the game we're going to be open, take the right ones, move the ball. Obviously they're going to corral on Nick whenever he gets it, so just being ready to shoot off of Nick, playing off of penetration, and things like that.

Q. Last time you guys played Penn State you had two days before you played Washington, and we saw kind of the product of what happened with the rest. Especially with the gauntlet you guys have in the Big Ten, what did it mean today to get that contribution off the bench? Is that something you were kind of thinking about today, about the game you might have tomorrow?

CHRIS COLLINS: Not really. I mean, you've got to win. We always tell guys in tournament situations, if you start thinking ahead to another game, you're going to get beat. It was more about, what do we have to do to win tonight? I just thought Justin, Jordan, Tyler, all of them coming off the bench really gave big contributions in a lot of different areas, not just scoring, but energy. Justin hit a couple huge 3s in the second half. Tyler, I thought his offensive rebounding in the first half with Tre being in foul trouble, he came in and played extended minutes, did a really good job. I thought Jordan Clayton was just steady. He's been very solid for us here the last month of the season.

Those guys were great off the bench. It was more about tonight living to see another day. We just wanted to keep playing. Then you figure things out after that. If you win the game, it's like, okay, what do we got to do? Fortunately we did, and we'll get back to the hotel and dive into some film with Indiana. We just played them very recently. So they'll have a great familiarity with us. We'll have a familiarity with them. And we'll do our best to put a game plan together to give us a chance to compete.

Q. Nick obviously had a rough close to that Minnesota game on Saturday. What do you make of his ability to bounce back tonight and all season through those tough losses?

CHRIS COLLINS: That's who he is. I want him in those situations. He's won a lot of games too. Nobody feels worse. You don't really have to say anything. It was just, hey, man, we didn't get it tonight. The ball's going to be back in your hands again, and I know you're going to bring us home in the next game.

He's learned, when you're the best player, you kind of learn when that's on your plate, like it's something you have to go through. He went through it last year, the last 10 games once Brooks got hurt. I thought it really prepared him coming into this season, understanding what it means to be the guy and how, when you win, you're going to get a lot of the credit, and when you lose, a lot of it's going to be on the coach and the best player, and I've told him that.

That's the kind of thick skin you've got to have, and that's the kind of resiliency to say we're going to bounce back and find a way to win the next game.

Q. Is there a return time line for AP? Also in this game, what did you see from Tyler and Tre stepping up for the second game now?

CHRIS COLLINS: Obviously we're a big guy down with AP. AP will be out tomorrow. He won't be with us tomorrow. Then it's kind of a day to day after that.

This is who we got. Guys have to just by committee, we've got to figure things out. We've got to guard the paint. We've got to rebound. We've got to bring physicality.

Can't just be on those three guys, Nick, Tre, and Tyler. It's got to be on the guards too. We've got to get in there, help rebound, bring physicality.

I thought Tyler really stepped up. He really stepped up and gave us good minutes tonight. It was exciting for me to see as a young player in his first Big Ten Tournament to come in and give those positive minutes for us.

Q. Penn State really tried to slow things down in the half-court, especially in that first half. How did the transition game help you guys get into a flow offensively?

CHRIS COLLINS: I thought getting some turnovers. We had forced seven turnovers in the first half, and just watching some of the clips as a staff, we just felt like our hand activity and our aggressiveness was just a little bit off. We were a step slow to things, rotations. We felt like deflections were there to be had.

The way they were making passes, we felt like we could, if we really dialed up our defense and our activity, we could force some more turnovers. They had 10 turnovers in the second half. A lot of those were live ball, which allowed us to get out on the open floor and get the easy baskets.

That's one of the things, when you play with Jake and Jayden together, it really opens up the transition game. It also gets Nick in the open floor. I think Nick had at least 10 points tonight in transition, which makes it hard in the half-court, they're just swarming him, double-teaming him every time. They're swarming his isolations.

So if we can get in the open floor, a broken court where there's numerical advantages and mismatches, it's an opportunity to really attack with Nick as well.

Q. At the beginning of the season, you talked about this being one of the deepest teams you've ever had and having as many as 11 guys who can play on any given night. By tonight that's been whittled down to eight, obviously partially due to AP's illness. Taking a step back, what did you learn about yourself as a coach in having to manage such a deep rotation and eventually trying to whittle that down into a little bit more manageable bit?

CHRIS COLLINS: It's a puzzle that you try with every team. Every year you come, every team is different. You see it now, we had eight new players. We had five freshmen and three transfer portal guys trying to figure out their skill sets. We knew what we had with Nick, but other than that, everybody else was kind of an unknown in terms of what kinds of off-seasons they had, how they would come in, the new players.

Early in the season we took a lot of different starting lineups, a lot of different things we tried, tried to give different guys opportunities to play. The season kind of unfolded the way it did. When it got to a certain point, we obviously wanted to give our freshmen a really good chunk of time for their development while still trying to win, but understanding we're trying to continue to build our program and get back to a level where we've been the last three years.

Obviously it's been disappointing, took a little bit of a step backwards with our record. But with injuries, with play good and bad, all those things, you're always constantly as a coach trying to figure out your team. No one is more self-critical of their team than I am -- of myself than me. I've been around this my whole life. Obviously I don't read media reports and social media and all that. I'm my hardest critic in terms of trying to get the best out of all of these guys.

There's things I haven't done that I've got to be better moving forward. Right now I'm in the fight. This isn't self-reflection time. It's a hard question to answer because in my mind right now I'm thinking about how we can beat Indiana.

There will be time when the season ends, whenever that may be, where there will be time for reflection of, okay, how do we have to build this thing? What does our roster need to look like? What do we need to do to get ourselves back when we were in that top half of the league over the past three years? Those are going to be things we have to figure out in the off-season.

Right now I'm in the fire, I'm in a fight. So I'm not really thinking about that honestly.

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Penn State Nittany Lions

Mike Rhoades

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THE MODERATOR: We're now joined by Penn State head coach Mike Rhoades and student-athletes Kayden Mingo and Josh Reed.

MIKE RHOADES: Congratulations to Northwestern and Coach Collins. I thought they, especially in the second half, played a very good game. Credit to them. I thought the key to the game was the turnovers and the points off turnovers, 24-7. I thought that was the game right there.

I appreciate our efforts, especially from our only senior Josh Reed, and the way he led this year and his approach and how hard he played for us. I'm bummed to see it come to an end for him, but this is that time of the year. Just not good enough to win a Big Ten game here in a conference tournament.

Q. Josh, obviously as Coach just said, talking about the last year for you, I know you've had an awesome last month, not just this game, but in total this season?

JOSH REED: It's been a really amazing year here at Penn State. No regrets. I'm glad I came here. I was super happy to be here the whole year. I met so many new people who helped me grow on and off the court. So many new lessons and experiences that I'll hold for the rest of my life.

This is the place where I wanted to end my basketball career, and I'm glad I came here.

Q. Kayden, your first full year of collegiate basketball is over. What are you taking away?

KAYDEN MINGO: I'm very grateful and very blessed for the whole season. I feel like God put me in a very good position with a lot of good people around me. Going into next season, I'm really looking forward to fixing things that I could do better to help the team win. Be back here and win more games. That's the most important thing. Winning more games.

Q. Josh, you talked about how this is the best place to end your basketball career. For your and a lot of your teammates, this was your first year at State College. How do you think that helped you guys bond knowing you're going through that experience of being in a new place and being on a team together?

JOSH REED: I feel like we definitely grew and bonded a lot, especially over the summer when I first got here. We got really close really fast, and I feel like that definitely helped us on the court as a team. It's just rare to see that with basically a whole different group of guys.

Everyone likes each other. Everyone got really close really fast. We have a lot of vocal people, a lot of personalities on the team. It was really no trouble at all getting along.

Q. This is being your final season, what do you hope to leave with the rest of the team after you're gone next year?

JOSH REED: I just hope they can take away certain things from me leadership-wise and also just being their friend off the court. Hopefully it's just -- I'll be in touch with Kayden for a long time. He knows that. He can always call me, I can always call him. Same thing with the other guys on the team as well.

We've just developed that kind of relationship in such a short amount of time. I'm going to always be there for them no matter what.

Q. Obviously eight freshmen, one of the youngest teams in the entire nation.

MIKE RHOADES: Thanks for reminding me.

Q. A lot of these guys getting a big run early on in their careers. How do you think that could help them going forward knowing that for guys like Kayden, they have seen what it takes to play 30 minutes?

MIKE RHOADES: Experience is your greatest teacher in life. When you're a freshman, a real freshman, 18 years old, and you get thrown in the fire of playing at this level and in the Big Ten when everybody's bigger, older, stronger, you learn a lot. Unfortunately, you learn a lot through failure.

Kayden is an example and some other guys on the team too that their spirit of coming back every day to work and stuff like that, we can build on that without a doubt, led by him. It's the approach you've got to have.

I mean, it's hard. It's really hard when you have a really tough January and February in the Big Ten because it's unforgiving. It could wreck you. You try your hardest to stack days, and you have tough results. You've got to use all that as great fuel for the off-season and to live in the weight room, live in the gym, and take the next step as a college basketball player.

Q. You talked about yesterday with the turnovers and trying to limit those as a big key for this one. Obviously in the second half down the stretch there, the word you used after Ohio State, it kind of snowballed on you guys again. What did you see during that time period, and what went wrong?

MIKE RHOADES: We were right there in striking distance. I think it was a two-possession game. We were right there and self-induced.

Look, Northwestern plays very physical and very aggressive in their half-court. Coach Collins, they get turnovers in their half-court defense. I told our guys the key to the game -- the two things that were the key to the game is we can't turn the ball over and we have to rebound.

You go down there and you don't rebound, you have to sustain your defense for another full length of a shot clock.

We did a little bit better in the second half. The rebounding hurt us. 24 points off our turnovers, that was the game. Just maybe the physicality pushed us down a little bit, messed up our timing. You fight the pressure a little bit, and you get -- I'm not going to say we were lazy. Our guys played hard today, played the right way. We got off to a good start.

That's the next step for us. If you're going to beat a Big Ten team in March, you can't give them the ball.

Q. Can you speak on the decision to start Mason today, and how do you think he performed?

MIKE RHOADES: I thought the last three weeks he's been playing harder than others and his physicality and just the way he competes. He gave us 20 minutes today. We started three freshmen. You don't really want to do that in the Big Ten, but that's what it is for us right now.

He's going to get better and better. He cares so much. He works very hard. He's very competitive. He's got a body, a big strong body. I thought his defense was good today. We need a little more offense out of him, but I thought he did some good things. I'm proud of him.

Q. Obviously looking back on this season now, what are some of the biggest takeaways for you as a coach or as a person that you've learned about yourself through all these challenges you face this season?

MIKE RHOADES: It was a really hard year for me. It was really hard. The world we live in now, you want to give yourself a chance. You want to give your team a chance to be successful. So it's hard. The reality is when you're really young in Power 4 basketball, you're at a disadvantage. So we need to address that, and we need to get our young guys bigger, better, and badder and stronger.

That's it. You've got to be old. You've got to be old because everybody else is. The best teams in our league and the best teams in the country are old and experienced. We've got to address some of that.

I always reevaluate everything I do and what we do in the program, and I'll do that again. I know that works. It's been a tough stretch. This is a hard job, but it's pretty awesome too, the Big Ten and trying to figure it out at the place where I am.

Q. Coach, you talked about getting older, getting more experienced, but also in the Big Ten, so much of it is about growing together. How do you think having so many of those guys who came in together, who are having these learning experiences together, is going to help when they're sophomores, juniors, seniors, knowing that not only have they been through it, but they've been through it with each other?

MIKE RHOADES: That's the key nowadays. Will they stay together? Can you keep them together? With the things that go on outside these doors, with the poaching and all

this crazy stuff, you don't -- I'll go back to it. It's real relationships, real relationships that have a lot of love and trust. You sweat together. I'm going to lean on that stuff all the time.

But you've got to play the game of the landscape of college basketball. So we'll do everything we can to bring the guys back that want to be here for all the right reasons and do it and build on it and get them some really good players around them and do this right.

Since I've been here, we've had some really good wins. We just don't have enough. That's got to be the goal, and it starts with the guys that are in that locker room for all the right reasons.

I love them. For everything we went through, we had a really good group of guys. They were coachable. They were about the right stuff. You could hear Josh, that was one of our leaders. Even when we got off to a tough start in the Big Ten with the schedule we had, we didn't have crybabies or complainers. Guys went to work and stacked days, and I really respect that and appreciate that.

We've got to use that to catapult and move forward.

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