Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Iowa Hawkeyes

Ben McCollum

Bennett Stirtz

Cooper Koch

Postgame Press Conference

Iowa - 75, Maryland - 64

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by head coach Ben McCollum, Cooper Koch, and Bennett Stirtz from Iowa.

BEN McCOLLUM: First off, obviously excellent season by Maryland. They gave us fits this game, and obviously the second time we played them they beat us. Coach Williams does a good job. He's going to get that thing going pretty good.

I thought our kids after the first 10, 12 minutes kind of settled in. I don't know what it was, if it was just the jitters or not used to the environment. The concentration was pretty low to start, and I think that probably had something to do with the environment maybe, not because it was a big time -- it is a big time place, but more just the conference tournament type of deal.

Then we regrouped, settled in, and executed our scout, which was really good.

Q. To the players, the 21-0 run you had in the second half, you had assists -- 9 assists on 9 field goals. What got the offense kind of going, and how were you able to move the ball so well in the second half?

BENNETT STIRTZ: I thought we were playing with fear in the first half and we were trying to win in the second. I thought we were making good reads. The defense was collapsing when me and Kael went in there, and our bigs were making good pocket reads, and then Coop was knocking down 3s.

As a collective group, I think we were flowing pretty good.

COOPER KOCH: We were also able to get stops, so they couldn't set up their 1-2-2. We were able to flow in the offense and getting side to side and then getting downhill to kick out to shooters.

Q. Ben, you already mentioned how the first 12 minutes, it was 12:20 specifically that you guys really struggled, and it seemed really similar to the first time you guys played Maryland, then you guys turned it around. What do you feel like was the difference in this game versus the last time you played Maryland when you weren't able to turn that corner?

BEN McCOLLUM: I think our collective grit. I do think we kind of hung in there defensively a little bit and we executed. I thought that we played with more intent from just the defensive side of the ball, just our rotations, our help, and kind of dialed into that. Offensively eventually we got it going.

For us it's really -- the hardest part for us is sometimes we probably don't talk to each other enough on the floor from an offensive perspective. Then what happens is I may tell Coop something or Bennett something or somebody something, and the whole team doesn't quite know. We're off the same page. Then all of a sudden we're starting the play at 18 seconds.

That's just part of our growth, part of our season, part of the story. Again, I was really proud of them that once they dialed in and kind of fought through some of the frustrations and kept going.

Q. Cooper, it seemed like during the season there was a stretch where you just seemed to struggle from 3 and then started to turn it around here late in the season. What kind of changed from that point till now to where you're building that kind of confidence?

COOPER KOCH: Nothing really changed. I just kept doing the same stuff in the gym -- keep working on my shot, keep instilling confidence in myself. That's what my teammates and coaches do. They're not going to knock me for any shot I take.

The teammates just found me in open spots today, and I knocked them down.

Q. Bennett, you've had some circus shots that have gone in this year, and you had another one in the second half there. Can you just take us through that play.

BENNETT STIRTZ: Yeah, there was three seconds on the shot clock, and of course that was the first 3 I had to make all game long. It was probably the hardest 3. I had some easy looks that didn't go in. They felt good.

But yeah, I guess you could say that got me going. I thought it was a foul, but you can't control what the refs do. Onto the next.

Q. For either player, you guys had six turnovers in the first 13 or so minutes and then just five the rest of the game. Did you guys feel the jitters, like Coach mentioned in his opening statement, or just get in a rhythm thing?

COOPER KOCH: I think we kind of just came out flat. They had a game under their belt, so they were kind of tuned up ready to go. We came out not ready. After the first 10 or so minutes, we figured it out and got back into it.

Q. Bennett, I'll ask you, after the 12:20 mark in the first half, like I said before, you guys shot 32 of 47 the rest of the way. That's 15 minutes to 32 makes, and it seems like your guys' offense the last few months specifically has been taking a trend up. What do you feel has been the change in the offense of last month leading up to this game, where when you guys were really struggling, you found a way to turn the corner and really go on smooth sailing?

BENNETT STIRTZ: I think it's a credit to our coaching staff. They see what the defense is doing in the first couple minutes, and then they tell us at halftime or in the media timeouts what to do and what's there. Just like looking at things on the iPad and stuff like that, seeing what's open, I think really helps.

Q. For both of you guys, you get Ohio State tomorrow, but how important is it to have this game under your belt before you get the Buckeyes tomorrow?

BENNETT STIRTZ: I think it's important, but it doesn't really matter at the same time. We got down 14-2 at our place, and that can't happen again, especially in the conference tournament. So we've got to be ready to go.

Q. Ben, I'll ask you the same question I asked the players. Nine assists on nine field goals in that 21-0 run. What did you like about the way the offense was flowing at that point?

BEN McCOLLUM: We passed the ball. That was nice. That's a start. We got stuck, and we didn't see we were just trying to score on the first action. In the second half, I thought we were going to do a better job in basketball. With the actions, we did a better job of executing. We'll get in the pockets a little bit and knock down shots.

Q. First half I know you guys struggled offensively for a while. How did you evaluate the defense? It seemed like there were a lot of 3-point shooters open. I know you struggled to stay in front of Mills, and Coit's a handful. You were better staying in front of the ball today. Did that start with Combs? How would you evaluate the first half defensively?

BEN McCOLLUM: The first half, I thought our offense was poor, and that kind of hurt our defense. I thought the defense kind of held us in there for a while. I thought our rotations were better. I thought we didn't foul so much at the rim. We were much better at showing our hands, which was nice. We had a few that were just like, oh, gosh.

Other than that, I thought we did a good job of taking the two shooters away. We gave Number 12 two clean looks that we really didn't want to give him. Other than that, I thought we did a pretty good job.

Q. I guess with Cooper Koch set another career high in points. How important is that for your entire team to be able to have someone like him step up, especially here in March?

BEN McCOLLUM: It really spaces the floor for us. I know whatever people would always ask about are you worried about him not taking shots for a stretch? No, I'm not. He'll make them. Just keep taking good shots. He'll make them. We've seen him shoot, and you've seen kind of the result of that.

It just takes time to acclimate yourself to the system, and we're getting him there.

Q. You called that early timeout, 18 or 21 to 10. What was the message in that huddle?

BEN McCOLLUM: Man, just our concentration level wasn't there. Just I don't know, it seems unique, I love 'em. Sometimes I don't have a lot of hair, but they're making me lose the rest of it.

Because we have a great game plan, and then you come out and it's just like, whoa, what are we doing here?

Eventually they just kind of dial it in, and they figure it out. They did a great job of executing after that. Yeah, just do what we told you to do was pretty much the message.

Q. Tavion Banks, nobody's really talking about him. He didn't have a loud performance, but he had a plus 23 plus-minus. That was the game high. How did you see him affect this game today to have against the best plus-minus?

BEN McCOLLUM: Yeah, he played great. He defended. He defended angles. Did a much better job out there. He kept balls alive. He gets big defensive rebounds when the ball is bouncing around. His energy and enthusiasm for competing and winning is second to none, and I thought he was excellent tonight.

Q. I know this sounds like we're beating a dead horse here, but is Alvaro like the key here moving through to postseason offensively to kind of -- almost like that missing piece? If he gets going, mix that with Bennett and with Tavion, he hasn't made a 3 since February 22nd, I believe he's 0 for 10 his last three games. Is he the key here? Obviously you haven't given him less time. You're still putting your faith in him. I'm assuming you think he's going to break out?

BEN McCOLLUM: He unlocks a lot of things for us. He's a really good passer. He can shoot. He can drive. He's got good length defensively. We just need him to do that. I think that's the biggest thing.

He's gotten better. He's getting more consistent as time goes on. Yeah, he unlocks a lot of different things for us that we need unlocked.

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Maryland Terrapins

Buzz Williams

Darius Adams

Isaiah Watts

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THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Maryland head coach Buzz Williams, along with student-athletes Darius Adams and Isaiah Watts.

Q. Darius, second half defense, what did you think Iowa was able to take advantage of in that regard?

DARIUS ADAMS: I think they were able to pack the paint well. I think that was their game plan the whole time. I think we got away from getting into the paint a little bit in the second half.

They played well in the second half as well, so I've got to give them credit.

Q. For either of you guys, what kind of lessons, looking bigger picture, that you take away from playing under Buzz and his staff? I know they kind of preach a lot of life lessons throughout the year, but what are some of those you'll take with you going into the off-season?

DARIUS ADAMS: It's really like the little things, little margins, the possessions. It's really the little things that win games. That's probably the biggest thing I've realized since coming to play college basketball.

ISAIAH WATTS: I would say the same thing, the little things. We say small hinges swing big doors. It's not always about hitting shots. It's not always about the assists. It's not always about that type of stuff. It's more about what are you doing on the bench? What do you do before you get to the game? How was your nap? That type of stuff.

Q. Isaiah, offensively, you had nine points, three straight 3s in that run. For you and the team offensively, what was working in the first half, and second half why did it stop working?

ISAIAH WATTS: That first half we came out with a certain confidence. We've been playing pretty well the last couple games. We got a rhythm. I think a little fatigue set in. Like DA said, they packed the paint, so we weren't able to get clean open shots like we wanted to.

Q. Talk about your relationship you built with Buzz this year. Entering year two, what's the thought process like?

DARIUS ADAMS: He's amazing. I have no complaints. I love playing here. We're obviously going to have our talk, and we're going to do what we think is best for me.

I haven't really thought about it yet, but we're going to talk about it, and it's going to be figured out.

Q. For either of the players, the second game in two days obviously. Did fatigue play a role in this game? How did you guys feel holding up, especially in the second half?

ISAIAH WATTS: I think fatigue played -- it's always going to play a role when you play in tournaments like this, but it's more about the mental side of things. That's what we talked about coming into it, executing on the mental side. But it got hard.

DARIUS ADAMS: I think the same thing. I think that it played a factor, but it wasn't really like what made us lose. Fatigue is always going to set in with anybody.

Q. What are some of the biggest lessons that you'll take away from year one coaching in the Big Ten?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I think probably roster construction would be one. I think the systems at each institution and better understanding how teams play, how coaches coach,

how they build their roster relative to the system that they run. That would probably be the top two or three things that I would say.

Q. Andre had nine points, 1 of 13 shooting, four turnovers. How would you evaluate his game today?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: 1 of 9 from the field, four turnovers. We had a turnover problem each time that we played Iowa. Not only a turnover problem by Dre, but our team turned it over too much. I think we had 18 turnovers at Iowa, 14 turnovers at our place, and then 16 today.

There's a reason why they're Number 1 in the league at defensive turnovers, how they play in the gaps, how aggressive they are on all penetration. They do an incredible job obviously, the best in the league.

So it's not only for us or any team, the turnovers, but for us we're dependent upon offensive rebounds, and you need to shoot it in order to get an offensive rebound, and we're dependent upon free-throw makes.

Again, like any team, but again today, only seven of our turnovers were live ball, but all turnovers combined, they scored 21 points off of our turnovers. The problem for us versus Iowa in all three games was a compounding problem, not just the turnovers, but what happened on the back side of our turnover.

Q. How would you grade the season as a whole? And have some of the challenges that have popped up this season been exclusive to this season, or have you seen them pop up in seasons past? How do you intend to correct those moving forward?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: It's probably hard for me to give a comprehensive answer to it. Some of the things are going to be in your control. Some of the things will not be in your control. I don't think an emotional answer for such a broad question is probably the right thing.

We always have a detailed plan on how we're going to improve in each of the areas, whether that's on the floor, off the floor, what we do in the film room, what we do in the weight room. I think we've had great growth in a lot of those areas and a lot of those categories, but we always kind of divide it up into certain buckets on when we're going to evaluate all parts: How we scout, how we recruit, how we make decisions, what we do, ATOs, anything you can think of.

I'm excited about learning that. I think any organization that has life and has good energy, they're always evolving, they're always learning. Probably the next time I'll see you, I could probably answer it a little bit better.

Q. What kind of evaluations are going to happen in the coming weeks, whether it's with players, staff? Then when do you kind of shift towards portal -- I know you've already been looking at stuff, but when does that kind of come full throttle?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I would say you do that every day, similar to what DA said. The model of all of this has changed, so there's never a complete answer, just like you're seeing in college basketball. There's players being signed in December and January. There's some of them playing here right now.

That's a hard question to answer, not because I'm dodging it, but the model suggests you probably have to do a little bit of that every day. How you're going to evaluate the conversations that you're going to have, there's more people involved in those conversations.

The first 15 years of my years as a head coach, those conversations were pretty regimented on who you were going to talk to, when you were going to talk to. Then as things have changed, each year it's changed. Like even this year it's changing. The portal doesn't open until after the National Championship Game, whereas last year the portal opened the day after Selection Sunday.

All of it is ever changing. So I don't know that there's enough data to suggest the exact right way to do it, but I do think part of it is an everyday thing.

Q. After the game yesterday, you were saying the team is shooting more 3s as of late, and today you took 15 3s in the first half and just 6 in the second half. What is Iowa doing to stifle your 3-point shots?

BUZZ WILLIAMS: I think we probably scored more in the first half from 3 than they were anticipating. They're a heavy gap team. As you look at how they play, Coach is an incredible offensive coach, and a lot of what they do is mesmerizing, but what they do best is score in the charge circle. That's what we fell today defensively. I also think that defensively, with them being in the gaps, they're trying to protect the charge circle too with an undersized team like ours.

So I think we probably stretched them a little bit by the 3s that we made in the first half. I wasn't in their locker room, but I would say they were trying to prevent those, or as much of a volume of those in the second half.

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