Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Washington Huskies

Danny Sprinkle

Quimari Peterson

Zoom Diallo

Postgame Press Conference

Washington - 83, USC - 79

THE MODERATOR: We have student-athletes Zoom Diallo and Quimari Peterson. We're now joined by Coach Danny Sprinkle.

DANNY SPRINKLE: Awesome win. First Big Ten tournament win in our school's history. It couldn't come in a better fashion for this group. Adversity hasn't defined us all year. This group's been through a lot. We've got eight players right now. For them to continue to fight and to keep coming back, I wish we wouldn't dig ourselves such a big deficit each game.

They don't quit, man. They keep fighting, and somehow somebody keeps making a big play. Whether it's a big defensive stop, whether it's making a huge three. I think Quimari's 3, we were up one and he hit a three with a minute left to put it at four. That was huge. Those are back-breaking plays.

Zoom was terrific. Playing with four fouls the last 12:30 of the second half. I think he had a double-double that second half. It was tremendous. Everybody stepped up. I thought Courtland's 3, when he made it, it was huge.

It came down to getting stops and guarding without fouling in that last five minutes of regulation, really eight minutes of regulation, and then overtime. Just kept finding a way to win.

Q. Coming out of the half, you guys were down by seven, what was going on in your guys' heads?

QUIMARI PETERSON: We've been in this situation before. We know what we got to do. Buy into coach's game plan and take care of itself. If we go out there and work hard and get to the loose balls more, that's what we were missing and the rebounding, and we did it in the second half.

Q. I guess for both of you, Wesley fouls out. How does that change the way you guys play as a team and your roles in particular on the ball?

ZOOM DIALLO: Wesley brings a defensive mentality to our team. Him being out was a little hurtful. That means next man up. Guys got to step up.

It was just coming down to who was going to make the big play towards the end of the game. We've been in position like that where a dude's been in foul trouble or a dude's been out hurt. It was just one of those guys. We need five to fight, and we had five to fight.

I want to shout out my teammate Courtland. He came in and stepped up big for us, and him just owning the moment. I feel like the last few games he came up and wanted to part of the moment. With Wes being out and him taking over, that definitely helped us.

Q. I wanted to ask about just kind of the grind of this season, traveling a lot, things have been kind of up and down, and then you get into a situation where you're down. What is it kind of intrinsically that kind of pushed you guys to fight through everything and persevere and win this game into overtime?

QUIMARI PETERSON: I feel like the brotherhood we created. We've been through a lot. During the summer we had the camp stuff, and we had to sleep together. We did a lot of things together, and I feel like we built a huge relationship with each other. I'm just glad to have these guys. I'm glad to be a part of this.

ZOOM DIALLO: Most definitely. Again, we've been through a lot of adversity. There's so much trust with each other as players. We've been bonding in the hotel, all together, all playing games. I feel like that comes a long way having that brotherhood and trusting one another.

You never know what can happen in these games, having trust.

That's what we've been through all season. Coach always says all we need is five. The five we have is willing to fight, and we're going to do it every time, every game.

THE MODERATOR: Any more questions for the student-athletes?

DANNY SPRINKLE: I got a question for you. Why do you guys keep getting down 15 points in the half? Can you cut that out?

ZOOM DIALLO: Coach, we've got to stop that.

DANNY SPRINKLE: I like that.

Q. I just had a question, this tournament goes for so many days. You guys already have a game today where you go into overtime, play an extra five minutes. How do you manage a tournament where you could be playing back-to-back-to-back days --

DANNY SPRINKLE: I hope we are.

Q. -- and you already have such a limited rotation as well?

DANNY SPRINKLE: At this time, you don't get tired. When you're a player in March -- we've got plenty of media timeouts. You've got fouls. We've got plenty of time to rest. Our guys, they'll be ready tomorrow.

At this point, there's no excuses. Everybody's dealing with foul trouble, guys out, so gotta hoop.

Q. So you guys struggled against Wisconsin heavily the last matchup. What's the outlook in tomorrow's game playing against a team that you really couldn't do much against?

DANNY SPRINKLE: What did you say?

Q. You guys struggled a lot against Wisconsin the last match.

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah, we struggled a lot. Credit to them, they made 17 or 18 3s in that game. Hopefully shooting in this big ole arena for the first time and us having a game under our belt, hopefully they don't knock down that many 3s. But that's who they are and what they do.

They've got elite shooters. They've got two of the best guards in the league, and they're going to be coming with a chip on their shoulder because they both could have easily been first-team all league.

I believe that playing against those two, that's what they do. Their bigs can really shoot the basketball. Their whole team can shoot the basketball. They pose a lot of problems.

We're going to have to do a much better job with our energy and our force. I thought we were on our heels last time, and we didn't really respond to the adversity that well when they started making those 3s, got on those runs. We have to do a better job guarding them and taking care of the basketball on the offensive end.

Q. Hannes only had 10 points, 4 of 10 shooting. First, what does it mean to have other guys who were able to step up when he has a down game? Second, how do you get it going tomorrow?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Yeah, other guys have got to step up. They're going to get shots. I thought USC, they did a great job game planning. They made it hard for him. Sometimes they'd come double and sometimes they'd come dig it out. I thought they did a great job boxing him out, sending multiple guys at him. All that does is create lanes for other guys.

I thought we made them play a little bit more in the second half. Courtland hit a big 3. Wesley hit some. Quimari got some off the attention that Hannes was getting. When teams are guarding him like that, these other guys are plenty capable.

For us to make 11 3s, that was great. I wasn't worried because you look at the games yesterday and today, it's such a great shooting league, and some of the great shooting teams haven't shot well in this arena. I was like we haven't shot the ball well this year, and I said, come on, watch, we're going to come out and hit 10, 11 3s. That's what happened. Hopefully we do that again tomorrow.

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USC Trojans

Eric Musselman

Jacob Cofie

Kam Woods

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THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Coach Eric Musselman along with student-athletes Jacob Cofie and Kam Woods.

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Congratulations to Washington. They beat us three times this year. I thought first half we played really well. That's been the story of our last eight games. I think we've led at halftime 4 of our last 8 games, and as a group, we haven't figured out how to close games the last 20 minutes with a lead.

Disappointing last eight games of the season. I thought up until that point we played good basketball. We were in a good spot in the Big Ten standings. We were in a good spot in the NCAA bubble watch or whatever at that point, but the last eight games has not been good, and it's basically been second halves that have hurt us.

I can't wait to get to work for next year, starting tonight when I get back to the hotel.

Q. When they went on their 13-0 run, what did you see happening from your perspective? Is it mostly offense, defense problems, a combination? Was there kind of like a snowball effect going on there?

KAM WOODS: I would say it was defensive side. We could have gotten more stops and took the life away from them. That leads to bad shots. We know the way that we supposed the play to win in the game and we failed firmly. That's why they went on that 13-0 run.

JACOB COFIE: I'd say it was a combination of things. I feel like we could have done a better job following the game plan.

Q. Kam, you had the ball at the end of regulation. You had the ball in the last 30 seconds of overtime. How did you feel about the looks you guys got, and what did you try to do on those possessions?

KAM WOODS: On the last one, I feel like I missed Ezra on that cut. Coach trusted me with the ball in my hands, and I feel like I let him down. Yeah, that's how I feel.

Q. Jacob, obviously the way that this season ended was not how you guys wanted. How will you look back at this year? And what do you think went wrong in the last month?

JACOB COFIE: As a team, we faced a lot of adversity. I felt like we did a good job sticking with it and trying to play for each other. We had to deal with a lot of injuries. I felt like that played a huge deal in it. We still fought. We tried our best.

Q. Getting ready for next season, are you going to decline any sort of postseason NIT or that type of tournament bid? What would be the thinking there?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: I would say probably not, but I haven't had in-depth conversations with admin yet about that, but I would assume we're not going to play, just based on number of bodies and how we played the last eight games.

Q. What would you say are kind of your priorities then as you move forward?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: I think we have a lot of priorities. One, the health. I think, when we're going in the portal, we've got to do a good job of finding durability. I think that's a big piece of not just this year, last year as well.

I haven't been doing college that, that long, but I've never had two years with just guys unavailable due to injury.

Look, it's been a tough year. We're leading tonight for 30

minutes, and this has happened quite often. Priorities, competitiveness, toughness -- same things that every coach in the off-season wants to try to prioritize.

Q. Terrance Williams, is that another injury or your decision today?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Yeah, that was totally my decision, yeah.

Q. And then Alijah, obviously a tough night for him, and you kind of went away from him in the second half there. What was going on with him? Did that make it tough in the last 10 minutes to not be able to count on him?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Yeah, I think for us it was -- they played four guards. We were trying to look at defensive matchups and trying to get shots on goal. I thought we got a little bit sloppy with the ball as a group, not anyone individually, any player at all.

Nothing anybody, whether it's Terrance or Alijah. It was staff's decision on who was out there.

Q. Did you feel like the guys' belief held up in the second half when they were in the middle of their run? Obviously you alluded to having some tough second halves. Did they stick with it, in your view, those guys?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: Yeah, and I haven't studied the stat sheet obviously because the season is over, but I think, when you look at our defense in the first half and we held them to 36 percent, and then you go to the second half, and from a field goal percentage, they shot 42, 41 point whatever.

I thought we were -- pick-and-rolls, maybe there was a couple breakdowns, which there is with everybody. Yeah, I thought they followed what was asked for the most part. I think that, when you lose, we'll be able to -- whether we watch the game back on the plane and look at it, I'm sure there's going to be some things, but there is every night, I think, especially when you lose. You can find holes in areas that you can get better at.

Q. I know you've got some high school guys coming in next year. Do you want to try to build more that way going forward than trying to turn over the roster every year? What's your approach to roster building going forward?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: I don't think -- we really didn't have a choice in year one. To take a job and have one returner, that was not on us. That was kind of what we walked into. Then you have a season like this, there's a lot of stuff you've got to think about.

Obviously having the two Ratliffs at seven foot, coming in and McDonald's All-Americans, I think that's a good -- we had a McDonald's All-American in basically our first recruiting class with Alijah, and to get the Ratliff twins -- we're still going to recruit high school for this year.

I don't think we're necessarily moving to the portal. When I say I've got to do some stuff tonight even, it's high school guys because the portal doesn't even open until whatever, April 7th, whatever it is.

Yeah, we want a blend of both. It's early in our tenure or whatever, and we've got to figure out a way to get better than what we've done the last two years.

Q. It is a real grind and probably more challenging for West Coast teams to play in this league just with the amount of travel. You were able to get a three-game road trip, and that was kind of -- and you navigated that pretty well. Overall, what are your thoughts on travel in the league right now and the challenges associated with it? Is there anything that could be done to mitigate some of those challenges for a West Coast team?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: I think, number one, the travel, in my opinion, can't be used as an excuse. We're in the Big Ten. To be honest with you, when I look back at last year and we went at Illinois, they're ranked 10th or 11th or whatever. I look at winning at Nebraska last year. I look at this season. We should have won at Iowa. We committed a foul late.

We had a couple good -- winning at Wisconsin was a good one. So we actually played -- I kind of felt just as good on the road.

We wanted the three-game road trip. I would love a four or five-game road trip, based on my experience coaching at the NBA level. I think there's a reason that the NBA and the NHL don't play one or two-game road trips or two-game road trips across the country.

I think as this stuff continues to evolve, we need to research and maybe follow the path of people that are really, really smart in how they do things, meaning the NHL and the NBA because, when I was in the NBA, you don't go from Golden State to play Miami and Orlando and then back. You go to Philly and then maybe Jersey, and you do that a couple times.

It's hard with school. We've looked at it, and actually in my opinion -- it's just an opinion -- we'll actually miss less school because most of us all leave two days early before the game. So we're not going the day before the game. I actually think from an academic standpoint it would help as well.

But there's no excuse. Look at USC's women's team last year and how they played. Look at UCLA's women's team. The answer to the equation is get a heck of a team and go kick butt. That will solve -- I've watched those two women's programs. That solves a lot of stuff.

Q. Where does this eight-game stretch rank as far as the toughest stretches of your career? Is there anything you can use going forward to help you out of it?

ERIC MUSSELMAN: It's the toughest by far, Ben. In the NBA, you go through four-game losing streaks, and it happens. Yeah, I've never -- like normally our teams like start to get cooking at this time of year, and we prided ourselves on that, whether it was Nevada or Arkansas.

I've never experienced anything like this, but we've got to get better obviously. Like I said, when I look back and things that we've always talked about at Nevada, we're never losing two games in a row. That was our theme. We lose a game, and it's like stop the bleeding right now. We couldn't do that for this year for whatever reason.

It was tough. I don't really like the grind. When you're in the NBA and you play 82 games, that's a freaking grind. Playing 30 is not a grind. Losing eight is a grind, in a row.

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