# Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

*Chicago, Illinois, USA*

*United Center*

## Northwestern Wildcats

## Chris Collins

## Nick Martinelli

## Jake West

Postgame Press Conference

Northwestern - 74, Indiana - 61

CHRIS COLLINS: Just really proud of my team. This was a big win for us. We felt all year long that, and even though you have to win to show it, we always felt like we're better than the record indicated. If you look at how we competed in this league, we haven't been able to get over the hump. We've lost a lot of close games, suffered a lot of self-inflicted wounds, breakdowns defensively in games we thought we'd won.

For these guys, I think at one point we were maybe 2-13 in the league, and you've got five games left. A lot of teams are looking for Cancun or wherever, Fort Lauderdale, whatever it may be, but these guys weren't like that. There's no quit in this group. They kept coming to practice every day. We kept preparing.

I said all along we had a lot of young guys. It reminds me so much of my group with McIntosh and Law and those guys, and we were 1-10 our first 11 games, and we finished 5-2 in the last 7. It kind of set the stage for that group as they eventually made it to our first NCAA Tournament.

Nick, we know what Nick brings. He's an absolute warrior, animal. He's going to bring it every day. For this guy right here to my right to come of age as a freshman in this venue against a team the quality of Indiana, just so proud of him and Tre and Angelo, who's a sophomore, and Tyler Kropp. There's a lot of young guys out there competing.

Just really proud of this group and excited about the opportunity to keep playing. That was our whole goal. You want to keep playing. I thought our defense really stood the test in the second half against a team that's very difficult to defend.

**Q. Coach mentioned the bruises you took this year and the lessons you learned in some of those losses. How did you learn the lessons come to fruition today in a game like this?**

NICK MARTINELLI: It's really a credit to the young guys to keep their heads up through thick and thin, and just been practicing super hard. These guys love being in the gym. It's not like we have to beg them to be in the gym. They're in the gym all the time, and that's just one of their qualities. That's why we've been able to pick it up at the end of the year.

**Q. Jake, I wanted to ask you about the foul, where you went up, you got clubbed across the face. It got upgraded. You went to the line. What did that say for you to be composed in the moment to be able to do what you needed to do, but then also the resiliency that that kind of seemed to continue to spark you guys and provide you with even more momentum because it was already going in your direction tonight?**

JAKE WEST: Like you said, I just stayed composed. I knew that team really wanted to fight. I knew it was a big game for them, obviously trying to go to the Tournament. We have goals as well, and we just kind of stay grounded. Nick has been a great leader for us. So just following his way and staying composed.

**Q. Jake, can you talk about the confidence that you're playing with right now?**

JAKE WEST: Yeah, I feel like I'm playing with a lot of confidence. Kudos to Coach Collins for believing in me. Just being really confident. I work very hard, like Nick said. A lot of our guys are always in the gym, so why not be confident?

So just taking the right shots and being confident.

**Q. Nick, it took you a little while to get going in this game scoring-wise. Talk a little bit about how Jake**

**kind of picked you up early in this game.**

NICK MARTINELLI: He does such a great job facilitating the offense. I really like having this two-guard look where these guys can really -- they both do a great job facilitating. Obviously we had to get going. We've been having a little bit of slow starts as of late.

Hopefully tomorrow we can have some pop right off the bat.

**Q. Nick, in your four years at Northwestern, you've never lost to Indiana. When it's a one-point game at halftime, what does it do for your confidence level to know you can be successful against that team?**

NICK MARTINELLI: They're a great team. You saw in the second half when it started to get chippy, they really cared. They really came in this game and wanted to win and fight. They're very well coached.

But when you come in the locker room and this could be your last 20 minutes with this jersey on and you know everything that -- all the work that you've put in with these coaches and these players, you just can't let that slip, and we've let it slip too much this year. Hopefully we can continue to push.

We obviously have an opportunity tomorrow. I don't even know how we're going to be able to sleep tonight. We're so excited to get to play again.

**Q. I think one of the special things about the Big Ten is over time veteran players can develop reputations against certain teams. I think back to Boo against Michigan State. You had two great games against Indiana this year. Is there something special about when you're playing these guys?**

NICK MARTINELLI: Not really. There's something special about playing every single game with these guys. These could be my last couple games here, and I just wanted to give it everything I've got. Every time I step on the floor -- you don't think you're going to have a bad game when you have a bad game.

I just try to get myself ready to go for every single game. It's such a blessing to be able to play on this stage with these guys, with coaches that have the utmost belief in me.

**Q. How have you seen Jake kind of develop from where he started the season till now, when he can pour in 18 points to a do-or-die game for you guys?**

NICK MARTINELLI: His development has been great. Even in the summer, I knew this kid was going to be a good player. When I came back in the summer, I just remember he got me on an island and cooked me pretty bad. I told him that's when I was kind of like, oh, this kid is real.

Brooks, he was at the practice, and we were just talking about him. So much praise to him. He puts the work in. He just said it. You guys can tell he's putting the work in.

Yeah, to perform on this stage as a freshman is unbelievable.

**Q. Nick, this is kind of obvious, but how motivated, how rewarding is it for you to keep playing this week?**

NICK MARTINELLI: As I said, every single game is a blessing, but obviously in the Big Ten Tournament, this is the most games I've won in the Big Ten Tournament. Yeah, it's super motivating to have guys that are sticking by your side after all the struggles we've been through. Yeah, it's super motivating.

**Q. It seemed like these two games played out similarly. You push out ahead and wear them down and eventually win by more today, but you really get more control of the game in the second half. What gave you confidence in the way you approach Indiana, particularly defensively, in these two games where just sort of staying the course would get you where you need to go?**

CHRIS COLLINS: If we could just bottle up the second halves of both of the games, it would have been really good. They're very difficult to defend. Their movement and cutting and off-ball weak-side action, it's very difficult.

It was fortunate for us we just played them, so our guys had a familiarity with some of the movement and some of the things. We know how good Wilkerson is. We know what Tucker can do. Their guards' ability to drive the ball. Alexis has been playing of late.

We struggled early. I thought they had a lot of points in the paint early. They were driving us. We had some miscommunications on some of our post doubles. They had some good schemes. They were getting us caught in some tough spots.

Then the second half, we just talked about it, it was 37-36 at halftime. I thought we were playing very well offensively and so were they. We just talked about whatever team was going to buckle down and find a way to get stops in the second half would gain control of the game.

I just thought our guys, they're following Nick's lead. This guy, he loves being at Northwestern and wearing that jersey, and our guys know they owe it to him to play as hard as he does every single play while he's still playing.

I saw that tonight, the way we were going for loose balls, our connectivity on switches, our physicality, our rebounds. It just was really fun to watch because those were a lot of the things that we've struggled with this year and have cost us in a lot of games.

To watch the young guys come of age -- but this was a big win. We knew it was going to be an NCAA Tournament type of game. We talked to the guys, and we knew what Indiana was playing for. We knew what their sense of urgency was going to be. We told our guys, let's approach this like it's a first round NCAA game because that's the kind of urgency they're going to have. I thought the game had that kind of intensity and really proud we were able to get a win.

**Q. Yesterday it seemed like Penn State challenged you guys with foul trouble, with the younger guys kind of staying that way. Today it felt like Indiana challenged you physically. How do you think you guys responded to that?**

CHRIS COLLINS: I thought we kept our poise. It was clean chippiness. Both teams, it was getting a little edgy there. You really want your young guys, we were just saying in the huddle, let's keep playing hard, but let's keep it clean. Let's not lose our heads. Let's not lose our poise.

I thought we did that. I thought we kept our intensity. So proud of the young guys, like I mentioned earlier. I look out there on the floor, and Nick's the only senior playing. Everybody else on the floor is an underclassman. So in this kind of environment in today's day and age, there's not a lot of underclassmen playing.

Indiana's team is super experienced. Tucker is a fifth year. Wilkerson's a senior. Dorn's old. Conerway is old. Enright's a fifth-year senior. We're playing against men out there. So for our guys to come of age and play the way they did, I was proud of them.

**Q. Coach, coming in off 21 hours of rest, the guys didn't really look sluggish at all. They seemed to come alive in the second half. What does it take mentally for this squad to rise up past the tiredness they may have?**

CHRIS COLLINS: We talked about it right before the game. I said to the guys, come on, guys, when you were little kids, we all love the game, all of us -- coaches, players. Like when you were shooting in your driveway or you were in the park, you would always dream -- I would use my imagination all the time. You would dream of playing in these kind of games, playing Indiana University in the United Center on national TV in the second round of the Big Ten Tournament. If you can't get juiced up and energy, then you should turn your jersey in, really.

We just talked about taking advantage of an opportunity. You don't want to waste when you get chances like this to compete against storied programs on big stages, NBA arenas, national TV type stuff.

I knew our guys were excited. They're giving everything they've got. This is going to be a big tournament. We play a really physical team tomorrow, and we're a little bit underhanded on the front line, but we'll get our heads together, and we'll come out and fight. I know we're going to fight. I can't promise what the result's going to be, but I know our guys are going to give everything over these next 24 hours to get ready for Purdue tomorrow.

**Q. Coach, you were able to really neutralize Tucker DeVries today, much the same as you did a couple weeks ago in Indiana. What kind of defensive schemes have you employed to really shut him down? A crafty scorer.**

CHRIS COLLINS: He's such a good forward in terms of being able to do a little bit of everything -- he can handle the ball, shoot 3s, back down younger guys. We tried to switch all of his actions to take away the pick-and-pops because those pick-and-pops are deadly. Then when he gets it in isolation situations, you just try to play his tendencies and do the best you can without fouling and try to make him take tough shots.

He missed some he normally makes, but I thought we did a good job of not letting him get loose. He actually got -- his cleanest looks were early in the game. He had a couple of open 3s early. Then in the second half, I thought we made him a two-point shooter, which I think is the biggest key.

Guys are going to make shots they normally make too. You're not going to completely shut out the best player. You've got to take away their strengths, and sometimes you get fortunate that they're not on, so to speak, like they normally are.

**Q. You guys have the shortest commute of one of any of the 18 teams in this tournament but one of the longest roads. After this season, the Cats have had to still be alive on Thursday playing Purdue, how does that feel?**

CHRIS COLLINS: It feels great because a lot of teams would have shut down. We were 2-13 with a lot of just gut-wrenching losses, games that we had leads, big leads, games that we just let slip away. That wore on our team. For our guys to hang in there and since that stretch be able to win 5 of our last 7, and the two games we lost were a buzzer beater at Minnesota and a game against Purdue that came down to the last shot.

So these last seven games, we've been playing our best basketball. Our guys are confident. They feel good. In these tournament settings, you can't think about the duration of the tournament. I told the guys, like you can't think about, oh, we've got to play this. You've got to play the game in front of you, and then you just figure it out.

Like we were just in a war against Indiana. Okay, now you've got to play Purdue. Well, thanks a lot. But you go back to the hotel, you figure it out, and we're fortunate that we got a chance to keep playing. I know our guys are confident, and they're excited about the opportunity.

**Q. Based on what you just said, it doesn't sound like Arrinten is going to be a go tomorrow. You didn't have Jake last time against Purdue. Is there a world where you're able to go a little smaller? Obviously rebounds is a top priority. You guys only had 11 defensive rebounds.**

CHRIS COLLINS: Thanks for reminding me. I want to enjoy this win right now, and I just had visions of Kaufman-Renn and Cluff down low banging us with their big bodies. We know what's ahead of us. We know how good this team is.

I've said all along, this team has a lot of seniors. These are guys who have played in the National Championship Game, and they've got a lot of pride, and they've got great players and arguably as good of a coach as there is right now in college basketball.

We'll look at the film. There's things we did maybe pretty good that we can continue to do, maybe some tweaks where we'll be a little bit undermanned. I don't know how small you can go with these big bodies, but our guys will play with a lot of heart, and we'll do our best to give ourselves a chance to compete.

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## Indiana Hoosiers

## Darian DeVries

## Tucker DeVries

## Lamar Wilkerson

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THE MODERATOR: We have Indiana coach Darian DeVries along with Lamar Wilkerson and Tucker DeVries.

**Q. Tucker, Coach Collins was just saying a minute ago that their focus defensively on you was to try to make you a two-point shooter and take away your comfortable response. A, did you feel that out there? B, how frustrating was it, especially in the second half, that you guys couldn't really get anything going offensively?**

TUCKER DeVRIES: Obviously I think they did a great job executing their game plan as a whole. I thought in the first half we were able to get in the paint, make plays for one another. I felt like we had a lot of assists on our lot of our buckets. Then second half it just felt like we were a little more stagnant. We weren't able to get in the paint as much and get as many easy looks as we did in the first half.

A lot of credit to them as well as on us trying to execute.

**Q. Tucker, just how frustrating is it to end the season like this with 7 of 8 losses?**

TUCKER DeVRIES: I mean, it's about what you'd expect, especially with the amount of seniors we had. We all came here wanting to lay the ground work for this program and the culture and really set the tone, but just down the stretch of the season, we weren't able to capitalize on some of the opportunities we had.

It really sucks that none of us are really going to put this uniform on again for a regular season or this tournament.

It is what it is, but it's really frustrating.

**Q. Lamar, your thoughts on kind of what went wrong in the last six, seven, eight games when the losing streak kind of happened? Just give us a player's view what happened there.**

LAMAR WILKERSON: I just feel like we just got stagnant. We just weren't playing our best basketball. The other team that we were playing, they executed well. They did what they had to do. We made a lot of self-inflictions that cost us the games through that last stretch.

Yeah, we just weren't hooked up like we were supposed to be.

**Q. Tucker, for you, I guess defensively over the last six, seven games here, you guys have given up on average close to 1.3 points per possession. Tonight very similar in the second half. What were some of the key defensive breakdowns over the last month, specifically for you guys to obviously see that downfall?**

TUCKER DeVRIES: We've had a lot of conversations, especially the last couple days, about trying to really get back to the ground work of our defense and getting back to the habits that we're supposed to be able to execute. I thought towards the end of the year that kind of slipped on our end, just the attention to detail and some things.

At this level if you're off by the slightest margin, they're going to make you play, especially the teams that we're playing in this league. They're really talented teams that put you in a lot of difficult spots. If you're not connected 1 through 5 on defense, they're going to pick that apart pretty easily.

**Q. For either of you guys. You were down 45-44 early in the second half, and I think over the next 10 minutes or so it was just two field goals. Was there anything in that stretch that you thought wasn't being done offensively? What was the difference there that you weren't able to score consistently?**

TUCKER DeVRIES: I think there's a lot of different things that go into it. I thought, like I said earlier, we weren't getting in the paint as much and getting cleaner looks. A part of it's a lot easier to score when you're getting stops. We sent them to the free-throw line, I felt like they were in the bonus at the 10, 12-minute mark. We've got to do a better job of keeping them off the free-throw line. When they have their defense set, they're really good defensively.

We weren't able to get them in transition very much in the second half, and I felt like that really kind of stalled us out and took away some of our execution.

**Q. Obviously this season is concluded, and a lot of people are focused on the transfer portal already. Just in general, what skill sets do you want to add to this roster moving forward that you think are going to be really impactful for next year?**

DARIAN DeVRIES: As we talked about a little bit as the season's gone on, just developing more depth and having more size and physicality for this league is going to be critical. I thought that was something that we just didn't have a lot of depth there to sustain it over the course of a 20-game league schedule. That's certainly something we have to prioritize to give ourselves just a better chance on the interior of the rebounding and being able to post and being able to get guys in and out and sub and have some depth there. That's something that we'll have to really search on for.

**Q. Coach, was there a specific time in that second half where you just kind of saw a different thing from your team? It looked like they had a sense of urgency at the beginning, and then it kind of petered out late.**

DARIAN DeVRIES: It was interesting to start the second half. There was a stretch in there, about three, four minutes in, it felt like Northwestern's defense had really cranked her up a little bit, gotten really physical, started slowing our movement, and then we weren't able to get by people to get to the ball to go make a play. So you ended up with a lot of windshield wiper offense.

Again, that's been something that that's kind of hurt us a little bit, especially these last seven, eight games in the second halves, just not getting -- able to find a secondary way to score has been a problem for us in a lot of these games.

**Q. I recognize you guys are on the bubble. If Sunday comes and you're not in the field, I know this may be a hard question to answer today, but what do you feel like got established in the program this season in terms of you talked about principles and those things and things that will outlive this roster, what do you feel like you have sunk roots into this program this season if this is your last game?**

DARIAN DeVRIES: I told the guys, it's a great group to coach. I think their practice habits were really good all year. They've represented themselves, our program, in a first-class manner. All these guys came, outside of Tucker really, with not much to go off of. Conor a little bit.

When you're putting that many new guys together and their ability to maintain a really good locker room throughout the season, I thought it was pretty impressive by them and what they did, the way they carried themselves, even during tough times.

Like I told them, there's no going back. Every season you've got a certain amount of games you'd like to have back. Certainly we felt like there's a little more in there for us that we would have liked to have gotten done. These guys continue to stick together even during a couple of these losing streaks and stuff and continue to maintain positive and work and do things the right way. I'm certainly appreciative of that group and especially that group of seniors.

**Q. Obviously if this is your last game, last game obviously coaching Tucker throughout his college career, obviously a lot of emotion in there. Probably not the best game that he wanted to end his potential career on. Can you just talk a little bit about what it's meant to coach him, obviously from freshman year up till now, to really see him grow as a player and as a person, as a dad?**

DARIAN DeVRIES: I think the hardest part, you go through so many things. When you have that father-son relationship and then your coach relationship. I know from my standpoint as a coach, as a dad, just proud of the work he's put in and the way he's continued to lead. Even, again, during some harder times for him as a player.

I think those are the things you're most proud of, is when you get to see the way he carries himself, good or bad. Whether he played good or bad, he continued to just push forward, lead, and do things the right way and put in the time and work to try to always improve. That's the hard part is you don't get to do that anymore.

**Q. Darian, if you don't get NCAA Tournament news on Sunday night, will you want to play in one of the other postseason events if invited?**

DARIAN DeVRIES: We haven't really gotten that far yet.

We'll have to talk to administration, coaches, and players and see where that's all at.

**Q. Vibes may matter right now for emotions and whether this team deserves to be in the NCAA Tournament, but frankly it's about body of work for the entire season. What's kind of your elevator pitch you would make to the committee right now to say, give us all due respect as far as whether or not you deserve to be there or not?**

DARIAN DeVRIES: I think the biggest thing we've talked about, when you're a bubble team, we've had a lot of Quad 1 games. I think the biggest thing for us is a lot of those Quad 1 games were against the top 10, 12 teams in the country. I think we had seven or eight of those losses were Quad 1 were against the top 12 teams in the country.

That's a challenging schedule. If you put other bubble teams in the same situations, we've been able to be really competitive despite that challenging schedule. Then you have wins against Purdue and UCLA and Wisconsin and some of our Quad 2 wins. I certainly think there's a case there. Whether it ends up being enough, we'll see.

That's something that I think this team, they've gone through it this year. They've continued to fight and battle and came away with some good wins along the way to back that up.

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