Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Rutgers Scarlet Knights

Steve Pikiell

Tariq Francis

Darren Buchanan Jr.

Postgame Press Conference

Rutgers 72, Minnesota 67

STEVE PIKIELL: We thank Rutgers nation for coming out, staying up late here.

Just proud of my team. These two guys were awesome, seven assists, zero turnovers for June, and Tariq I think broke our school record for points in the tournament.

We played them not too long ago, and it wasn't pretty. My staff did an excellent job of preparing. I like playing teams a second time. We made a lot of adjustments.

But we've been getting better, so proud of our guys. 40 gets you 40, and obviously quick turnaround time and got to play a team that took it to us, too, in UCLA. Got to get these guys some rest, but good day for Rutgers nation. Our band, cheerleaders are awesome. Kelly gets her first Big Ten win, and she's awesome.

Just really happy. But mostly proud of our guys. They fought through. They keep getting better, and they got a connectedness now, and our defense is getting better, and that's been a problem for us all year. And today we did a really good job against a good offensive basketball team. We hit more threes than they did, and last time they hit a lot of them.

It was a good day for us.

Q. Francis, of course good game for you today. What was working so well against Minnesota's zone defense that you were able to score so much and so effectively?

TARIQ FRANCIS: Just staying with the game plan. In practice we worked on the zone. We knew they were going to play zone with their numbers.

Just running the plays correctly and trying to keep the attention to detail right.

Q. What did you think of how Manny played today, scoring in the first half and three big blocks towards the end of the game?

DARREN BUCHANAN JR: He's been putting in a lot of work, and we told him today going into the game that a lot was on him, with him dominating inside and he did that from the opening tip.

I'm just so proud of E. That's a testament to who he is and he put in a lot of work. I'm just glad we could playing for him. We've got an opportunity to play again tomorrow.

Big game for E, and I just know he's going to build off it in this tournament. So I'm excited to see how we're going to compete tomorrow.

Q. I wanted to ask about your bench play, 21 points off the bench. That seemed to be a separator against Minnesota, which didn't score hardly at all off the bench. How instrumental were they tonight and how good were they all year to give you breaks?

TARIQ FRANCIS: I think they played great. They gave us great energy. They gave us great energy, Harun, J-Mych, KP, everybody that came in gave us great energy, and we knew they had less players and they played less players than us. So just being able to throw in different guys and heat them up a little bit, and they all have great shot-making ability. Being able to stay connected and playing together was important for us.

Q. Darren, you were playing with three fouls for most of the game. How were you able to stay so strong on defense even with those fouls already?

DARREN BUCHANAN JR: The coaching staff just told me stay ready and just stay with it. I normally am not in that

situation. I try not to foul. But I picked up three early in the first half. Everybody just believed in me to just stay aggressive and stay who I am. Big kudos to them because I was in my head about it a lot, and I wanted to be out there and compete with the team.

So just being able to go out there and play with three fouls and not pick up a fourth was huge for me and the team. I'm just glad I was able to go out there and do that and we came back with a win, so that was the biggest thing.

Q. For both of you guys, it was a very close game, back and forth the whole time, but you were able to get the win in the end. Talk about the toughness of the team to get the win and get over the line.

TARIQ FRANCIS: I would just say probably just the coaching staff. I feel like the coaching staff helped us really understand time and the possession of the game. So really just staying focused and knowing that the game was coming to an end. We were up towards the end, so we didn't need any more points. We just needed to get stops, and they emphasized just really stopping them and focusing in in those last minutes.

Q. You guys had a run in the second half where both teams were going back and forth, making threes. After that point completely shut them down. I don't think they hit another three until the game was a little bit out of reach for them. How did you accomplish that?

DARREN BUCHANAN JR: We just knew guarding the three-point line would win us the game. They've got great shooters in Cade Tyson and Bobby Durkin. We just knew if we run them off the line and force them into shots they normally don't take, and just rebound the ball, we'd come out with a win.

When they was on that run, we just told each other we can't let them live at the three-point line, and I think we did a good job of forcing them into bad shots and rebounding and getting down on offense and running our sets.

I think it was just us trusting our game plan. In the beginning we let them get some easy looks and we just doubled down on what we do, and it got us a win.

Q. Steve, you guys separated at the end. Did you think given you guys had more depth and were fresher, you were able to pressure them and outlast them at the end --

STEVE PIKIELL: They don't turn the ball over and they had 15 turnovers, so huge help for us. The last time they really took it to us, so I thought our guys were locked in. Reynolds had a great game and he was a major concern for us because he got to the rim.

But Harun helped us a great deal. E had an outstanding game, three blocked shots, seven rebounds, 10 points. We needed everybody.

But they were connected. They've been connected in practice, and we had two days to prepare, and this team plays very different, Minnesota, than any team in the league. They have elite shooters. They don't turn the ball over, and I thought our defense -- it's taken a long time, but we're starting to figure it out. We've always scored enough points for the most part this year. It's really been that end of the floor. To hold them under their averages was a good sign for us.

And 40 gets you 40, so we're excited about playing tomorrow against a great UCLA team.

Q. You had such a tough stretch in late January and early February, losing seven straight but then you've come back and won five out of your last eight. How have you been able to help get the team into that position to where they're winning games, and then conversely just not deciding to hang up the season at that point?

STEVE PIKIELL: I'll tell you, it's a credit to the guys. They just kept believing. Our staff, too, preparation. We've done a really good job, and I really like playing teams twice. We don't get to do that much anymore in league play because the adjustments you can make in Game 2, very different. We played them very different than a month ago and we changed a lot of things. We put some new tricks in. I thought it really helped us today.

But it's hard in this day and age, a lot of things distracting kids, focus, and these guys have just kept getting better. Our freshman class has gotten better. I'm proud of them. J-Mych today, six assists and really gave us some timely baskets. Juney played through foul trouble. Harun didn't have a great first half but he really helped us in the second half.

Just keep plugging, that's what we did. This league humbles you. It's a really good league. Good teams, really good teams have losing streaks. You'd better be able to manage the obstacles that this league brings. It's the best league in the country, or arguably one or two, or whatever people want to debate.

But I will tell you the coaching in this league is outstanding, the players are outstanding. You can go through times like that, and it's a credit to our guys. They just kept getting off

the mat, and we got better.

Yeah, just pleased we're playing another day.

Q. Obviously a huge game for Tariq. Speak about how important that was for Minnesota's own defense giving you trouble in the first half especially?

STEVE PIKIELL: We made more threes than they did, so Tariq a big part of that. He's a really good, unique offensive player. He really is. We had good command of our zone attack today, and we rebounded. We out-rebounded the team. We haven't done that in a while. All those things are important. When we did miss we got some second opportunities and getting 15 turnovers helps us with possessions, too.

But Tariq, obviously really important guy I feel real comfortable with. I'm glad he has another year.

Q. How long does the feeling of this win last before we're moving on to UCLA?

STEVE PIKIELL: Yeah, it's over. We're on to UCLA.

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Minnesota Golden Gophers

Niko Medved

Cade Tyson

Bobby Durkin

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NIKO MEDVED: You know, losing stinks. So that's the first thing on your mind. Obviously just look at this game, we knew it was going to be a dogfight. We knew Rutgers would play well.

You know, at the end of the day, I think it was the turnovers, right. We turned it over 15 times, 10 in the second half, and I thought that was the difference in the game.

But you give them all the credit.

It's hard right now for these guys and our team; you lose and there's some finality to it. But man, I don't know that these guys could have given us any more than they did this year. What an incredible response to so much of the adversity and the injuries. To win eight games in this league and finish 11th, and just do what they did was really something they should be proud of, and I'm just proud to be their coach. When the sun comes up tomorrow and the days go by, I think they'll understand that even more.

Q. I wanted to ask you about this type of a game where six guys played, and you're going up against a team that really came on strong in the middle part of the second half. How challenging was it? Did you feel wore down at all with about five minutes left?

CADE TYSON: I'd say it's definitely challenging. Give the credit to Rutgers. I thought they played a really good game. But I mean, of course there's a battle that comes with it, but I feel like we've worked hard enough for both of our bodies and our teammates' bodies to sustain itself that 40 minutes.

Honestly, as a basketball player, what more could you ask for than to go out there and compete for 40 minutes.

Q. Asking about the trajectory of the season, new coach with Niko. You guys had some really big wins. Take me through the season and kind of at this point what's going through your heads right now?

BOBBY DURKIN: I would say I think we really showed how good we can be. There was obviously stretches during the season where we dropped some games that we felt were winnable and could have came out with, but I feel like we just showed that we can really compete with anyone, and when you look at even some of the losses, I think we showed that.

So I think that's kind of what I look back on and see throughout the season.

Q. Cade, Niko mentioned the turnovers, particularly in the second half. Do you feel it was more self-inflicted or were they doing something pressure-wise that seemed to bother you in that second half?

CADE TYSON: Yeah, I'd say it's both. I think I personally may have got outside of myself a few times trying to put the ball on the floor and do too much, personally. But I also thought they did a good job of pressuring us and getting into us a little bit on the defensive end.

Q. As you mentioned, this year you guys dealt with a lot of adversity. Take me through 15-17, not the season you wanted, but you seemed to build a program here. What's the next phase you hope to establish this year and you hope to bring next year?

NIKO MEDVED: I think, you know, again, I'm at a point where I look at the overall record, and I'm just around these guys every day, and it's just like the hits just kept coming. You look at it, and all of a sudden we lose all these guys and we were playing seven, and then Jaylen Crocker-Johnson goes down, and now we have one available post player. For these guys to win four of their

last six and compete the way they do was really incredible stuff.

We talked before the season, and coaches, too, I'm like, hey, if we can -- we want to win as many games as we can, but at the end of the day, I want our fans and the people that follow us to be more excited about our program and where it's going than they were when the season started.

I think these guys really did that, and I think it was really fun to see the energy come back here in the arena and the people come out and support us. I think they really appreciated how our guys fought and played. I know I did.

Again, tonight stinks, but I feel really good about the future of Gopher basketball.

Q. Niko, in that second half when they took a four-point lead it seemed like you guys had a hard time trying to catch up. What was it about that stretch where you noticed that you guys weren't able to put together some momentum?

NIKO MEDVED: Yeah, I think you asked Cade. One thing we've been really good at this year, we haven't turned the ball over. We've been really good that way. You give them credit, too. We talked about it at halftime, they were going to ramp up the pressure. We just didn't handle it very well. I'll give them credit for that. It's always both. Give them credit for applying for measure. We didn't handle it. We could say we got worn down, but we played six for the last -- this has kind of been what it is.

Give them credit; we needed to handle it a little bit better, convert on a few more things. Again, it was a dogfight of a game, which we knew, but I just thought that was the difference.

Q. There are opportunities in the postseason if you want them. Do you anticipate trying to compete in one of the postseason tournaments, or do you think you'll shut it down?

NIKO MEDVED: I think it's too early to say. Right now, you're like, I don't know. But let's just give these guys a few days here and just kind of see where we're at and see kind of what the opportunity is and see if it maybe makes sense for this group.

But again, they've been through a lot. They're beat up that way. So are a lot of teams. But it's cool that maybe we'll earn the right to have that opportunity, but let's let the dust settle a little bit and see where it goes.

Q. I feel a little sheepish asking this, but looking ahead with this program, what kind of tone do you think this team has set for Gophers teams of the future and what you want your teams to look like now after you've completed your first full season?

NIKO MEDVED: I think they embraced what I believe in coaching and all the programs we've been at that have won, is that really unselfish, really competitive, connected, coachable, fun to be around. All those things. Embracing the adversity. It's all those cultural things this team did at a high level and set a standard that we knew we wanted, but these guys did it at a high level.

I think that will carry forward. I think the fans see that. It's something that they can get behind. As we continue to hopefully retain these guys, as we've recruited new guys coming in and we'll recruit guys here this spring, we talk a lot about that being our expectation and wanting to be a part of it.

I think we've got a great sell in the history that we've had developing players, playing at the highest level, winning. I think it's a fun style of play. So I'm really excited about the sell we have, and what we're going to be able to do here moving forward.

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