Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 12, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Ohio State Buckeyes

Coach Jake Diebler

Amare Bynum

Christoph Tilly

Postgame Press Conference

Ohio State - 72, Iowa - 69

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by coach Jake Diebler.

JAKE DIEBLER: High level game between two really good teams. Got a ton of respect for Iowa, what they've done this year and the potential they have here next in the postseason.

Really excited about where we are as a team right now, the fight that we're playing with, the connection we're playing with on both sides of the ball. It's really been a joy to coach this group.

They've stuck together through a lot of adversity, and I think that's why we're playing our best ball here down the stretch. Our plan is to keep it moving, keep it going. We've got to get some rest, some recovery, and get ready to do it again tomorrow.

Q. For either one of you guys, the first time you played Iowa, 17-point loss, kind of looks like a turning point a little bit in the season so far. What was different this time around?

CHRISTOPH TILLY: Definitely that wasn't us that game. We sat together and talked about it. Like you said, it was definitely a turning point. It was kind of a revenge game for us. Last game wasn't the way we wanted it. So we took this opportunity to change that and to show what we can.

Q. What does it mean to get another shot at Michigan here in the postseason?

CHRISTOPH TILLY: It means a lot. They're a good team. We're a good team. We're excited to play them, obviously.

Q. Early on in the game, it seemed like maybe there was a little bit of trouble with Iowa's defense, good defense. What changed, I guess? It seemed like something clicked at some point early in the first half.

CHRISTOPH TILLY: I think, like you said, they played well, like good defense. We stuck together. We were talking about it in the timeouts on the court, what we've got to do. Got to move the ball, cut to get open looks, and that worked.

Q. Amare, I guess when it comes to -- you had a lot of long defensive possessions. What does that do in terms of momentum and getting you guys going?

AMARE BYNUM: I would say our communication has gotten better throughout the first half. We had a couple slip-ups in the first half, but then once we got that, we started doing better offense and defense.

Q. For Amare, you kind of seem like you always know where to be on the court on offense. As a freshman, is that something that you developed throughout the year? Is that just like a general basketball IQ thing? Like, when you're cutting, how do you kind of know where to be at the right time?

AMARE BYNUM: I would probably say shout out to Bruce and them because a lot of my guys help up. When I see that, it's cut, get in the right place for them so they can pass it and throw the lob.

Q. You're up 16 on Iowa, and then Iowa cut it all the way down and then had that last look. What was kind of going through your mind when you saw the ball kind of squirt out after the free-throw and the shot go up?

CHRISTOPH TILLY: Yeah, that wasn't what we wanted, obviously. I was under the basket, so I kind of saw the ball, and it wasn't going in. I was kind of like relieved a little bit.

Yeah, definitely. They're a good team, and we were

expecting them to go on a run again. Then, yeah, at the end, it worked out for us.

AMARE BYNUM: I would probably say it's March, so that was definitely about to be a heart dropper. I'm glad he missed it. We've just got to get that rebound next time.

Q. Last time out against Iowa, Christoph, I know you weren't active for that game, but you guys got outscored by over 20 points in the paint. You guys outscored Iowa by 16 points today.

Amare, if you could speak to it a little bit, what was different? Was it having Christoph in the game? What was different in the game today?

AMARE BYNUM: I would definitely say having Christoph was really a help for us. Just being poised in the paint. We've been working on being poised, just finishing over people, and just using our athletic ability and just finishing.

Q. Jake, Tilly just called it a revenge game for Iowa. Is that something you kind of pushed as a coach?

JAKE DIEBLER: No, it was another opportunity for us. This team has had great approach game to game. We have high level respect for every single team in this league, and we've played our best when we've just taken it one day at a time.

This is a Big Ten tournament. You don't need extra motivation this time of year, the way we're playing. That thought didn't cross my mind. We didn't talk about that necessarily when we were together. Maybe they talked about it a little bit, but it was just kind of this was the next opportunity right in front of us, and we needed to be prepared. I thought our guys did a great job with that.

Q. Last time you guys played Michigan, there were two players with double digit rebounds. What's the plan on limiting the big play, the dominating big play of Michigan?

JAKE DIEBLER: We've got to be able to combat their size with some size. I think that's part of it. We didn't execute our rebounding coverages or rebounding technique well enough. Their size has been a real asset for them this year. They've used it on both sides of the ball really well. We've got to execute our job at a better level next time.

Q. Bruce has been one of the best point guards in college basketball for years at this point, but has never played in the NCAA Tournament. What have you seen from him in the season from a leadership perspective and his on-court impact to get the team over the year, it seems like?

JAKE DIEBLER: His on-court impact has been really special. You see the efficiency that he plays with. When you get the attention that he gets from opposing defenses, it's really impressive.

What we've been able to do as we constructed this roster is put multiple play makers out on the floor so we can move him in different areas and different spots, so he doesn't have to play make with the ball in his hands, and guys can create stuff for him.

We got a couple catch and shoot 3s today. That was other guys creating for him. And that versatility makes us really hard to guard. As far as his leadership goes, it's something he's continued to get better at each and every year, and it's something we're intentional about, he and I talking through, and I think we have a great group of guys whose chemistry is a really, really important part of our success this season.

That, I think, comfortability allows him to be the best version of himself as a leader. He's not on an island leading. We have other guys who are stepping up too. He's special. I think he's one of the absolute best guards in the country, and we're blessed to have him on our side. I'm excited for him to be in the postseason because I know how hard he's worked.

Q. Coach, you guys got off to a good start in the second half. What adjustments were made at halftime to go up on that big run?

JAKE DIEBLER: We've got to take care of the ball better. We had too many turnovers in the first half, and they scored off our turnovers. It's hard to guard them in the half-court, but you give them advantage situations. It's a problem for you. That was kind of really important for us, take care of the ball, trust each other, keep moving. I thought our offensive movement and pace in the half-court was better.

There was a stretch there where I thought we made it really difficult for them to score. They hit some 3s down the stretch. A couple of those were -- we had some communication breakdowns. A couple of those guys stepped up and made shots.

That's a team, they're so dynamic offensively with the pace they play at in the half-court. I know their total pace isn't super high, but what they do in the half-court, how they move, the multiple actions you have to guard, it puts a lot of pressure and makes you make decisions multiple times in the same possession.

I really am proud of the adjustments our guys made from Game 1 to Game 2 and then from first half to second half. It says a lot about the IQ on our team.

Q. To you, what is different with this matchup against Michigan, and what advantages do you see on the court for your guys tomorrow?

JAKE DIEBLER: I think we're healthier than we've been in a long time. I think that certainly helps. There's still an execution element to this game that's going to be really critical. Obviously, it's a big game. It's another big opportunity for us. We're used to playing in big, meaningful games.

This one, going against the team up north hits a little different. I've said that from day one. We don't run from that. But our approach and focus has to continue to be the same.

We are going to recover and prepare well between now and tomorrow, and then when we're out there, execute, play together, play tough, and keep having the fight we've had the last few weeks.

Q. I want to ask about both Puff and Brandon. Puff is day-to-day and Brandon, there's a chance that he might get back at some point. What's the status on them?

JAKE DIEBLER: They've finally been able to practice. I think that's good. There was a couple conversations in this game about maybe getting them in a time or two. I just felt like shrinking the rotation for this game is really important. Obviously, size is going to be critical next game.

Iowa went smaller this game at times, so we didn't -- at that moment, we went a little smaller versus going bigger, but I think next game we've got to have all hands on deck and ready to go.

Those guys have trended in a really positive direction, so we feel good as far as their availability goes for tomorrow.

Q. Jake, a year ago to the day, you guys lost this same game to Iowa in the Big Ten tournament, and now you're here a year later. You guys win this game, you're going to the NCAA Tournament most likely. Can you just speak a little bit about how far the program has come in the last year?

JAKE DIEBLER: Yeah, I think we've taken real strides from last year to this year. I'm blessed to have some great young men in that locker room and a part of this program, and that's a great foundation to start with when you're trying to chase something and build something.

So you combine that with our guys' ability to handle the adversity of the season is a big reason why we're in the position we're in. Our culture, our foundation, it's firm. So that's helped us weather the storms of life in the Big Ten. Like, every game is really hard. Doesn't matter if it's home or on the road. We've dealt with injuries and sickness and things like that, but we just kept moving forward, kept focused on the task at hand. Guys stepped up, which has been really important for us.

This is a really fun group to coach. Really fun group to coach. I'm excited how the season is going to play out for us. I really am.

Q. You guys finished the regular season on a high note and then you got the double bye. How do you think that rest helped you mentally and physically coming into today?

JAKE DIEBLER: We needed it. It would be great if there were a double bye in between the next game or something. Listen, we've had to -- this is a team that's continued to practice, and we continue to practice hard, but we're practicing really short. We've got to be really efficient with our time.

It's easy to do with this group because they enjoy being around each other so much. I think that's a really important part of success this time of year. We're fortunate to have that in our locker room. It was by design, but we've got great young men who have embraced it.

Yeah, we've got to rest, recover. It's going to be a big-time atmosphere tomorrow, and we'll be ready for it.

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Bennett Stirtz

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THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach.

BEN MCCOLLUM: First off, congrats to Ohio State. I thought they did a heck of a job today, particularly offensively. I thought they were really good.

We had a good game plan. I didn't think we executed it to that level. I actually thought our offense was better than expected. I think it was one point, two points per possession, which is quite a bit. They were, unfortunately, 1.24, which it's difficult to win that way.

I think we've got a good team. I think sometimes, we get ourselves to accept I don't know if it's second place, but accept good. I think that's a scary deal. I think we need to try to find great.

We're going to get there. We're going to keep fighting and, hopefully, do well in the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Bennett, your reaction to hearing Coach say this team sometimes is okay with accepting second place.

BENNETT STIRTZ: Totally agree with him. Sometimes

BEN MCCOLLUM: Kind of. Not like completely they're a great team, first off, just to make sure I but go ahead, Bennett. Sorry.

BENNETT STIRTZ: Sometimes I think we believe that we're good, but our facial expressions say otherwise. I think he sees that. Yeah, you've just got to trust him with what he's saying. He's trying to make us better, and he's trying to make us win. You've got to listen to all the coaching staff.

Q. Bennett, you guys didn't face Tilly in the regular season. I'm just curious, what was it like playing against him and making the adjustments you guys did make in the second half to kind of slow him down a little bit?

BENNETT STIRTZ: He's a game changer. 7 footer who can spread the floor, and every time he gets in the pocket, he makes a good read. He makes them a lot better and definitely a tough cover.

Q. Bennett, it seemed like there was some missed opportunities in this game for you guys. How do you kind of address that through the upcoming week to prepare for the tournament?

BENNETT STIRTZ: I think the coaching staff said all they could. It starts with me. I've got to be a lot better and get the team going and be a leader. We've got a couple days, see where we play. Got to get a lot better in practice.

Q. What's it like preparing for these high stress games like the Big Ten tournament and the March Madness? What goes through your mind before the games, and how do you stay calm during?

BENNETT STIRTZ: Obviously, there's some nerves before the game, and once the ball tips, you don't feel any of that. You've got to just go play. Pressure is a privilege. You've got to embrace the challenge and embrace the environments you play in.

Q. Ben, what allowed Thornton to kind of get away there early in the second half and got him going?

BENNETT STIRTZ: He's a great player. I think we played a really good defense at Carver, at home, and he just was feeling it today. He's obviously a great player, but I thought it started with us, and our coverage wasn't that great.

Got to go back and watch the film and learn from it.

Q. Bennett, you kind of already took my question.

Obviously, Bruce Thornton had 10 the first time around, this time he had 24. What do you feel is the difference with his game the this time around versus the first one?

BENNETT STIRTZ: I think he was just feeling it. He saw his first shot go in, and from there on, he was getting good looks. He was hitting some tough shots. He's a great player, and it's going to be tough to guard him anyway.

Q. I wanted to ask you about that last sequence where you got the timeout, you're down three, 7 seconds left, and Haasen takes that 3 coming out of the timeout. Was that the play you wanted, or what were you trying to get coming out of that timeout?

BEN MCCOLLUM: Kind of. We knew they were going to get Bennett the ball and we knew they were going to foul because they were screaming. To be honest, I think they tried to foul him. I'd have to go back and watch it, but I think they tried to foul him. That's why he shot that. So it looked worse than it actually was. You'll see the kid reach it and kind of shove him. And so he shot it, knowing he was going to get fouled.

It was actually a pretty crafty move. It looked worse, but like looking back on it, it was a pretty vet move. We knew we were going to have a tough time getting Bennett open, and if we did get him open, they were going to foul the other way. So you run him off that side, ran Brandon off the other side, and then Tate in the middle. We were just trying to get them to foul us for the most part, and then if they reached in, we were going to try to get a shot off and get three free throws.

Q. Talk about the start. You commented yesterday how you guys are kind of known for slow starts. Today you get off to an 8 2 start. You were holding them to, I think it was 14 percent, through maybe 10 field goal attempts, 11 field goal attempts, whatever it was. Just talk about that start, and what was the key there?

BEN MCCOLLUM: I thought we had a really good scout. I thought our offense was really clicking, we were getting in and out of things better, actually screening bodies. I thought the second wave of guys probably weren't as tuned in as they needed to be. Even our energy coming out wasn't elite.

Like I said before, we have to have elite energy when we come into games. It's just the nature of how we're built. That's just is what it is this year. If we're at 97 percent, it ain't going to be good enough in the Big Ten. We've got to be at 100.

I thought our execution was good to start. I didn't think our effort was elite, but I thought it was good enough to be able to sustain that early start.

Q. Bennett said that your post game message was mostly about how you believe in the team and that maybe he feels like sometimes they don't totally believe in themselves. What is it going to take over the next few days to get it to the point where they fully believe in what they're capable of doing?

BEN MCCOLLUM: I think there's probably a couple different things there. I think, one, sometimes you can, one, listen to the noise, or you can just walk out on the floor and see the differences in body types. They're a little bit bigger than us, obviously. In every game, it looks that way, and even games where we win or dominate, it's just the nature of how we're built.

That doesn't mean you're not good or better than your opponent. So trying to get them to understand that you're not just a win a conference tournament game team, you're not just a make the NCAA Tournament team, you need to be able to win those games.

I think often, this is why people sit in mediocrity for a long time because they start to fall in love with really good. I probably had that happen to me when I was in, like, my seventh or eighth year. We went to three straight Sweet 16s and lost by one, two points. I don't remember the exact scores. And I always thought we were really good and close.

Then I realized that was the biggest issue that we had, was the fact that we were settling for really good. I want our guys to understand that just because you've accomplished some things and everybody wants to compare it to last year, and I just don't do that. Last year is last year. The last coaching staff is the last coaching staff. I have zero interest in comparing the two, and I don't want our guys to either. We've got to compare ourselves to ourselves, and we can be better than that.

So kind of summing that up, trying to go from really good to being great is something that is really hard to do, and our kids need to understand really good is not acceptable. It's actually worse than being bad. I always cringe when I see coaches like especially new coaches, they finish like fourth place in their league because they never ever get a championship. Very rarely do you finish fourth and then win first place eventually because you don't hit rock bottom.

That was the benefit of my first two years is, we hit rock

bottom, and it's like, dude, I don't like that anymore. I like to finish first. So then you finish first. Then you do that a few times and you get really good, and it's like, okay, I like this feeling, but do I like it too much. Then all of a sudden, the next year, you win a national title. That's kind of a long answer to a short question, sorry.

Q. I'll ask you the same thing I asked Bennett, but just with those missed opportunities, how do you guys as a coaching staff kind of address that in preparation for the NCAA Tournament next week?

BEN MCCOLLUM: Missed opportunities in regards to being able to win this game or missed layups?

Q. Both.

BEN MCCOLLUM: We were 6 for 13 at the rim, so that's a problem. Need to be about 10 for 13, but that's not what I think you're totally asking.

I don't necessarily view it as a missed opportunity per se. I probably view it as we're still trying to improve and get better in the process, but not accepting any not lack of effort. We still played pretty hard. It's just like we've just got to get to 100 percent consistently to be able to win those games.

Q. You held them 1 of 7 through their first 7 in the first 10 minutes, and then they shot 20 of 25 over the next 20 minutes. What did they change offensively that gave you guys fits in between the end of the first half and the start of the second half, and then what can you say about Isaia's effort to get that rebound and shot up at the end?

BEN MCCOLLUM: I don't think they changed a whole lot, to be honest. I think they were running mostly the same stuff. I think over time, if you're not at 100, it's going to kind of wear on you, and eventually, they'll get good looks.

So it wasn't necessarily they changed. It's just they were pretty tuned in to things. We were too. It wasn't like we were awful. It was just, man, we've got to be 100. It's just the nature of what we are.

Q. My question piggy backs off Ethan's. 10 of Ohio State's 12 made field goals in the first half were dunks or layups.

BEN MCCOLLUM: I'm aware.

Q. 29 of their 34 points were dunks, layups, or free throws. You can't be happy with that. Kind of expanding on what Ethan said, I guess. Around the rim, what was going on?

BEN MCCOLLUM: You would think we were trying to take away the 3s, wouldn't you? Our whole game plan was to keep it out of the paint ironically.

So a lot of different things. Three of them were gambles. We gambled for three steals. One was off of a switch. So we switched, they set a flare screen instead of going to the man and switching that. We gambled for a steal, waved at the ball, they dove, Coop had to help up, they dunked.

Second one, we tried to gamble for a pass on the perimeter to their 7 footer. He just drove to the perimeter. So three of those were gambles.

I think the other three were busted coverage and ball screen, meaning we're in a certain coverage on different guys. One of their guys is really good at passing to the pocket or passing to the big. So on his, we weren't supposed to be so aggressive, and we certainly weren't supposed to come up after he was already set. We came up after he was already set. We didn't have our tag set, and they dunked it.

Then another one another two were off of and two were off of pin downs. You're supposed to top lock the pin downs, and we didn't top lock the pin downs. It was probably a lack of execution more so than anything else.

Is that descriptive enough for you?

Probably just not executing the scout.

Then the second half, they got us on some down screens where we didn't have the matchup that we typically like. We switched when we shouldn't have switched, and just a few things like that. Just some things where you just got to talk through some things, and we just didn't do that today.

Again, it's not the end of the world. We're excited about the NCAA Tournament. We're going to fight there too. That's just what we're going to do.

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