Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 12, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Wisconsin Badgers

Coach Greg Gard

Nick Boyd

John Blackwell

Postgame Press Conference

Wisconsin - 85, Washington - 84

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Wisconsin head coach Greg Gard along with student-athletes Nick Boyd and John Blackwell.

GREG GARD: Obviously, give Washington a lot of credit for making a comeback and pushing us to the limit there. I thought Steinbach was terrific, just like he was in our first game, and we got a little loose with the ball at times, and obviously, loose defensively and gave them some confidence that started in the beginning of the second half.

We were able to respond. Obviously, JB hit a big shot, Rohde with two free throws to be able to put us back up three.

I'll look through the tape. We've got to quickly turn the page and get ready for tomorrow. That's what this time of year is about, just find a way to get to the next one, and that's what we'll do.

Q. This question is for both of you guys. Washington's press made it competitive down the stretch there. How are you able to regroup in the huddle and maintain composure to close out the game?

JOHN BLACKWELL: I think with our leadership, we've been in moments like this. Just take care of it down late and then sealing the game. Good defense by them to pressure us, but I think we did a good job of just sealing it and just finding the open man.

Q. John, coming out of that timeout, you get the big shot. How did you keep your energy on the timeout on your sideline and then go up 3 there?

JOHN BLACKWELL: Just encourage the guys. When coach drew up the play for me, I knew I was to -- just try to make a good play out of it, whether to shoot or make the read. It wasn't about the shot. It was about just getting one last stop. So just encouraging the guys. When the team makes a run like that, all the momentum is on their side. So just encouraging the guys. Let's keep it up.

Q. Congratulations on your game. According to my research, you tied the third most points in a single Big Ten tournament game. What changed compared to the last time you played Washington? You only had 7 points last time, this time you had 34. What adjustments did you make?

JOHN BLACKWELL: I think I was just more aggressive this game around whoever's turn it is. Today, I hit some shots. So these guys did a good job of finding the hot hand. But at their place, Nick did a great job of getting to the paint, doing his thing, and BC had 32. If I'm not mistaken, he broke a record.

So it's just whoever the hot hand was. As long as we got the win, I'm good with it.

Q. John, you said last week with Nolan going down, you guys are fighters, you're going to fight for him, just like he fights for you guys. With the extra minutes the bigs got, what did you see in their development in rising to the occasion today?

JOHN BLACKWELL: I think the bigs did a great job on the offensive rebounding and defensive rebounding. Obviously, gave up a couple, but stepping up, Will Garlock had some great moments in the first half, got the and one dunk. That's a great progression out of him. And then Aleksas did his thing.

They're just going to keep getting better. They're young. They're going to keep getting reps and keep getting better game by game.

Q. Hayden had an and-1 as well. He touched on Will's and-1. Between him and BC hitting a couple of buckets early, how important was getting some of the bench performances when you guys were short staffed in terms of injuries early on to build that lead?

NICK BOYD: It's really important. Shakes the game up a little bit, gives us a jolt offensively. Defense has to start making decisions. BC didn't have his best game, but I'm excited because that means tomorrow all his shots are going to go in.

They just give us that extra energy and boost, and we need that.

Q. Nick, you were part of a Final Four run a few years ago that nobody expected your team to make. What kind of wisdom do you think you can instill in your teammates as you guys start your March run this year?

NICK BOYD: Just confidence. Together and confidence, that's the most important thing. My old team, we had a certain confidence and swagger about us. Every game is different. Here we only won by a couple points. Tomorrow it's a different game. We've just got to be ready to compete. If we compete, March will be special for us.

Q. The 3-point shots were flying early on. How much confidence do you have coming into that after the Purdue game after the last time you played Washington?

NICK BOYD: I've been confident since I was a little kid, so after those games, not much of a difference. It's good to see the shots go in because we really work on those in practice. Coach puts us through a lot of drills and things like that. Tat translates. It's good.

Q. You sort of touched on the short turnaround. What is the next 24 hours going to look like for you guys as a staff and allowing these players to rest and recover?

GREG GARD: The players are the most important thing, rest and recovery. Obviously, we played Illinois. We know they're a terrific team. So the assistants have already worked ahead knowing that, if we took care of business today, we'd be playing Illinois tomorrow.

We'll get back. We've got a meal. We've got study table. Actually, we're doing academic work while we're here on the road. We've got a scouting report later tonight, another meal, and then get ready to go tomorrow.

Q. Last time you guys played the Illini, you won by only two points, and you allowed Wagler to put up 34.

GREG GARD: Yeah, he's really good.

Q. Do you have a new game plan to keep him under control?

GREG GARD: I don't want to say it. I'm sure Coach Underwood and their staff --

Q. Do you have a plan?

GREG GARD: I'm going to be up all night. He's a terrific player.

Q. Greg, Jay Cohen, Associated Press. To build off of your earlier question, how do you balance the rigors of playing in this tournament in multiple games and days in a row while also getting your team prepared and rested and healthy for the upcoming NCAA Tournament?

GREG GARD: I think they're hand in hand. I think playing in this prepares you for what's coming next. You don't playback to back in the NCAA Tournament. There's obviously a day in between if you're fortunate enough to win the first one.

I think just being in a different environment, obviously a lot of bright lights and cameras and locker room access and all the things that happen within the NCAA Tournament, you get a feel for that during this tournament.

Obviously you want to continue to advance and win, and there's a trophy at stake, and they're keeping score. We're going to put everything on the table we can, but just like any other experience, you have to build upon it and use it to your advantage as you walk forward.

Q. You've been at this game a long time, been in the tournament a lot. How do you rely on your veterans? It seems like there's so many young guys now in sports, but how did the veterans on your team help the whole team?

GREG GARD: Yeah, I think that's important. It starts with these two guys that were sitting to my right. Postseason play is really guard play is vital, and I got two of the better ones in the country. You just maximize using those experiences, whether Braeden Carrington's got some experience. This will be the first time he'll play in the NCAA Tournament. Andrew Rohde is a senior.

So we've got some guys that maybe haven't been with us for a long period of time and transferred in but brought with

them experience wherever they were prior.

Q. That rotation where basically I think it's three guards forward, and then you've got a big there where you've got Rohde, Blackwell, Boyd, and I believe Braeden on the floor too. What does that bring to the floor, especially in the situation you're in now, rotating bigs and giving them rest?

GREG GARD: Washington, when they go -- they went to four guards. They had done that a lot yesterday against USC. We're better defensively guarding four guards with four guards. So that's really -- between that and obviously Rapp had some foul trouble, Rohde had some foul trouble, Garlock had some foul trouble, but playing smaller to combat what they were trying to do is really what we -- once they went with four guards with Steinbach, just trying to keep those matchups as much as we could and not get caught where we had some mismatches on the floor.

Q. You guys have made deep runs in the Big Ten Championship game these past two years. Is there anything in particular that you take from those experiences that you want to apply this year?

GREG GARD: I think just the things I've talked about in terms of your recovery. You're moving on. You're taking one game at a time. You're only guaranteed the next 40 minutes. We've been in a lot of tight games. We've been against really good teams. We've been in a lot of raucous atmospheres, which I know it will be loud in here tomorrow night or tomorrow afternoon. I'm sure a lot of red and a lot of orange.

So it's just you draw on all those other experiences. Every team is a new team. This is their journey through postseason play, and you use those experiences from each player that they've had. I have a few that have been with me before. But you draw more on the experiences and the growth you've had together during this current season to continue to walk you forward in the postseason.

Q. Aleksas and Austin have obviously been tasked with larger roles throughout the last couple games without Nolan. Obviously, limited by foul trouble and whatnot today. What have you liked out of them these last two games? And can the increased responsibilities they've had recently help them or help you guys once Nolan is back?

GREG GARD: Absolutely. I think this is big for them. This is huge. Aleksas, with how he played last week at Purdue and how he played again today, you know, I thought --you know, Steinbach is a handful. He's so good on the offensive glass. So all those experiences that he can get against that type of competition help, and obviously, Aussie getting more experience and more run during the guts of the game, so to speak, it's going to help them, which in turn, it helps us when Nolan comes back.

Hopefully, the end result makes us better. As Bieliauskas and Rapp get better, that continues to raise our floor.

Q. Steinbach had a couple of great games against you this season even though you beat them both teams. If an NBA team was to ask you what to expect from Steinbach if they were going to take him, what would you tell them?

GREG GARD: I don't know him, so I can't speak to his personality. I've heard great things about him, that he's a great kid and a he's a terrific worker. Obviously, the measurables he has, you look at length, bounce off the floor. His hands are terrific. He's got big hands. I think they make those decisions on those internal things, but for a kid that age to be able to do the things he's done and how he plays -- I mean, I was impressed with him before I ever got to Washington, when he was playing in the Euro stuff.

Whatever he does, if he goes in the Draft or he stays at Washington, there's a lot of options on the table for sure for a young man like that. It certainly sounds like from a personality standpoint, he's A-plus, from what I've gotten from Danny Sprinkle.

I'm glad I don't have to play against him tomorrow. He's been -- like I said, he was really good in both games, but that's who he is. He's been really good all year.

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THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Washington head coach Danny Sprinkle, along with student-athletes Zoom Diallo and Hannes Steinbach.

DANNY SPRINKLE: Extremely proud of our team and just kind of the resolve and the ability to fight through adversity, which we've continued to do all year.

It doesn't surprise me how we responded to being down 18, I think, to one of the hottest teams in the country, not just the Big Ten. They're extremely difficult to guard. When they got two guards like that, they combined, I think, for 57 points, Boyd and Blackwell. 57 points, 11 assists, 13 rebounds, and only 3 turnovers and 11 for 18 combined from 3.

When they're playing like that, they're going to be really difficult for anybody to beat. To give ourselves a chance down to the last five seconds to still win the game was really impressive of our team.

Not having the depth that we're accustomed to having, for these guys to continue to play together and fight, I couldn't be more proud of this team.

Q. Hannes, first year here in the USA after coming from Germany. The season is most likely over probably. What are kind of your reflections on it all, and how do you take these experiences as to what's ahead for you in the future?

HANNES STEINBACH: It was a really fun season with the team, like, we had such good chemistry. So I really enjoyed that part. Of course, we all wanted to have a solid year, but as I said, the chemistry on this team, the trust we have generated was a really great experience, and it was fun to play for Washington.

Q. Hannes, I thought your defense looked really good today, your verticality was awesome. You were challenging a lot of shots at the rim. What's been your mindset defensively at the end of the year? It sort of seems like you've gotten a better grasp maybe on that end of the floor.

HANNES STEINBACH: Just trying to stay in front of my guys and then the rim, just one up, trying to stay straight up so I didn't get a foul. So switched, just like staying in front of the guards and not letting them get easy shots.

Q. Zoom, coach was talking about those Wisconsin guards had big days. You put up 20 in the second half. How did you go bucket for bucket later in the game to push back?

ZOOM DIALLO: To be honest, I felt like I could have gotten that in the first half, but I was in foul trouble early. It was a long game, and I feel like my coaches did a good job of just trying to manage me for the whole game.

It was just, you know, they were going over the screen, and I knew that I could get to my spots and get dudes open. I feel like I was just playing to my strengths. I feel like in the first half, I could have done the same thing too, but I feel like I cost my team being in foul trouble.

We fought back in the second half, but it just wasn't enough.

Q. Zoom, you guys were down by 18, and those guys were just hitting in bombs. I know it can get real frustrating, but when things started to turn, was there a moment or something that just kind of ignited that turnaround that you can identify?

ZOOM DIALLO: I would say no. Our mindset was we were just never out of it. The whole mindset is, it's not over until it's triple zeros. We just played a game yesterday

where we were down 13. 18 is not that much.

I would probably say, when we started pressing them a little bit, we started to see they were getting a little worried, just starting to turn the ball over and starting to be passive with their decisions. We saw that real early, and we wanted to take advantage of it. Their energy started to change when we started to get real aggressive with them, and we just decided to take advantage of that.

Q. They just referenced it, but how did your defensive pressure change in the second half when Wisconsin started going on that cold streak?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Like Zoom mentioned, when we started pressing and picking up, it seemed like our energy got going a little bit. A lot of it was fortunate too. They missed some open 3s too. Like, when they're making those 3s, that lead could have went from 18 to 30 if they kept shooting the ball the way they do.

Hannes had some great wallops at the rim, and we started coming up with some of those balls that were going, and we transitioned and scored. That's how Zoom got going. We got some steals, got some easy layups. I thought he made some great efforts on offensive rebounds, even with a chance to tie the game there where he got the foul and the one-on-one.

It came down to just effort plays. We just needed one or two or more of those 3s to kind of fall within the sequence of the game.

Q. That can be a real frustrating team to play because it seems like every time you try to get a little momentum, they'll come down and hit a 3. The they were shooting lights out in the first half. Trying to keep it close, and Kamari goes down and sprains his angle. You don't have a lot of guys. How do you keep yourselves going?

DANNY SPRINKLE: They keep themselves going. We don't talk about injuries. We don't talk about adversity. It's next man up, let's go. If we have to play big, if we have to play small, it doesn't really matter. I've said it before, nobody cares who you have. Wisconsin didn't care that Kamari was hurt. We have to go fight no matter who's on the court.

So give our guys a ton of credit. They scrap for each other. We got the loose balls when we needed to, and they gave themselves a chance to win.

Q. If you were to kind of play this game again, would you change up the way you came out defending Nick Boyd and John Blackwell?

DANNY SPRINKLE: I mean, not really. You have to -- with kind of who we have, like with our depth, we had a couple different game plans, and we had to show different things throughout the game because any time -- if you try to guard Wisconsin with just one game plan, they're going to score 130 on you. They're too good. They're going to finally pick you apart.

So we wanted to switch everything early, and then we wanted to go and change up our ball screen coverage a little bit and change it up and get Boyd and Blackwell thinking. But when they're knocking down shots like that, whether it's man or whether it's zone or just making tough shots, there's not much you can do.

They took 18 shots combined, and they made 11 of them. Even if you're not guarding them, they still made 11. We had our hands in their face quite a bit. That's why I think they might be the best backcourt in America. Like they really might be. When they get going like that and playing off each other and some of those other guys start making 3s, they're really hard to guard.

Q. I'm curious after two years, Danny, like going through the roster building process with rev share, what changes, what have you learned going through the last two years that you can apply in this off-season, where I'm sure you'll have to be aggressive again?

DANNY SPRINKLE: The one thing I thought, in August, I thought we were going to be two deep. I thought it was going to be really hard to keep everybody happy and get minutes spread around. I didn't know we were going to lose eight guys to season-ending injuries and issues. That's probably the most in the country. Literally we have eight scholarship players not here and just a multitude of different injuries and factors.

That's what makes this group, like the way we played the last five, six games, like it's just impressive to me. Like I'm proud of them. I'm proud to be their coach because of I know how easy it is to quit -- when you're playing against teams like Wisconsin, even yesterday like we were down twice to USC in the last ten days. We were down big to Oregon on the road in a place -- like we could have packed it in any time in those games, and we just didn't and kept fighting and came back and won a lot of them.

That shows the character of this group, but we definitely need to hopefully have some more depth next year. We've got to add some more athleticism and shooting. This league, teams shoot the ball too well, and it's so hard to

win on the road if you can't knock down 3s. Even tonight, like even if you shoot it average, like they're making 15 3s. They outscored us by 24 points at the 3-point line. Our margin for error is not good enough to do that.

Q. You guys outscored Wisconsin 49-42 in the second half and went on a 21-6 run. I was just wondering what adjustments you made at halftime and how you helped support your team to keep them mentally in the game even down 18.

DANNY SPRINKLE: We didn't make too many adjustments -- actually, some ball screen adjustments we did. We had to stop switching 1 through 5 because they started hurting us with some rolls, and then their guards were attacking our bigs. We had to change up.

We tried to trap a couple times their guards off ball screens, but they're so good they get it out of the trap, and now they have numbers on you. That's where, I think, Rapp hit one of his 3s. They're good. You have to hope they miss some shots, and you have to hope the ball bounces to you because they can rebound it too.

Then just mentally it wasn't anything that we haven't been through, like I said, the last month. I just kept telling them, when we were down 13 with 9 minutes left and the timeout, fellas, we were just here last night. Less than 24 hours ago, we were in the same exact situation. If one team can get it done, it's you guys. Now we've got to go prove it.

Q. Hypothetically, if an NBA team asks you what they could be getting in Steinbach, what would you tell them?

DANNY SPRINKLE: Just not a good kid, not a very good player, probably needs four years of college (laughter). No. He's tremendous. He has unbelievable instincts to play basketball. He's a very good passer. His instincts to rebound are elite. Like, his effort to go rebound is elite, but then his instincts of knowing where the ball is, that's what's special.

He's a worker. He's not once complained about getting shots. He's never complained about getting the ball. He's an elite teammate. Honestly, there's not -- I can't say a bad thing about him. I really can't. He works. Any deficiency he has in his game, he's going to work, and he'll be tremendous at it.

His character and just like the type of person he is -- and once you meet his parents, like you understand the stock that he comes from. He's going to be a tremendous pro for a long time.

Q. Hannes, again, was a monster, 25 and 16, which seems to be the norm for him lately. Have you devised a plan to possibly get him to come back? Then also Courtland Muldrew.

DANNY SPRINKLE: We'll do whatever we've got to do to get him to come back. The whole city of Seattle had better step up and make sure he comes back. And Courtland?

Q. It just seems the more he plays, the better he gets.

DANNY SPRINKLE: He's competitive, man. I'm so pissed at myself because I had seen that and my gut was telling me that, and I should have been playing him a lot more minutes earlier. That's my fault. That's not Courtland's fault.

Like, the sky's the limit for him. It really is. He still needs to become more disciplined in his game and let his energy and activity. I never want to harness that. Like I told you before, he's my wild banshee. I need him to be a wild banshee, but I also need him to be really scout detailed in that.

From his freshman to sophomore year, he's going to make a huge jump in all that. Like mid-game adjustments, guarding the best players. You could see, like, Boyd and Blackwell, they kind of baited him into a couple fouls. They used his aggressiveness against him tonight. He'll learn from all that.

But he's so dynamic. He's not scared of the moment. He's not soft at all. Like, he has some real toughness, which I've known all along, which is why I'm pissed at myself that I didn't play him earlier.

Q. Given the lack of bodies that you had available, have you given any thought to playing in a postseason tournament like NIT in the off-season?

DANNY SPRINKLE: No doubt we have. That's another step for our program too, to go compete in a postseason tournament. You look at what it did for Nebraska last year, like I imagine that fed their off-season. They had a tremendous year.

Hopefully, something like that can happen for us and our program because our players deserve it.

Q. Kind of piggy-backing off that, Coach, once this off-season hits and your guys are finally all healthy, what are the biggest things you want to develop on this team? Being the fact they're majority freshmen and sophomores now becoming sophomores and juniors.

DANNY SPRINKLE: Offensively, we've got to better at our pace and our spacing. We've got to become better ball movers. We have to play with dynamic pace, and we've got to shoot the ball better. Everybody, it doesn't matter, 1 through 5, we've got to get in the gym. That's the only way you get confident in your shot, and we need everybody to be doing that.

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