

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Wednesday March 8, 2017

Patrick Chambers

Mike Watkins

Lamar Stevens

Penn State Nittany Lions

Penn State - 76, Nebraska - 67 - OT

THE MODERATOR: We'll ask Coach Chambers to make an opening statement.

COACH CHAMBERS: Proud of my team. Down the stretch, end of February, March, we had some difficult losses. I felt like we were still competing, playing hard, getting better.

The last couple days, I really think these guys just banded together like brothers and said, We can't go out like this. We have to go defend, rebound, keep teams under 70, find success. That was the way it was Monday, then Tuesday in practice.

We just had a really good approach and a good mindset. I felt like their energy, their juice. They were ready to compete and take that next step. Again, for us, nothing is easy. We go into overtime. You don't know how this team is going to respond because we've been there before, Indiana and Purdue, to name a couple. Man, did they punch back, and they punched back quick.

That was a major breakthrough for this program.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the students.

Q. Mike, you played this team three weeks ago, eight points, three rebounds, two blocks. Seemed like you tripled all of your numbers. What changed in the past three weeks?

MIKE WATKINS: We worked hard in practice, we defended and rebounded. Practice was very good. I knew coming into this game, it was going to be very good for me.

Q. Lamar, talk about your next game against Michigan State. You played them before. What did you learn from that?

LAMAR STEVENS: They're a really good team, with a great coach, Tom Izzo. We haven't focused on them



yet, haven't talked about them yet. We're happy to get this win.

But we're going to prepare. I think we're going to be ready by tomorrow.

Q. When Josh Reaves had that short injury, you put Nebraska into another scoring drought. Did you say anything as a team to try to make up for the loss of Josh?

MIKE WATKINS: Like when one man go down, we pick him up, injured or not.

LAMAR STEVENS: I really credit our leaders and our upperclassmen. They always keep us composed, being such a young team. So I credit Shep, Payton, and them for really keeping us fighting, keeping us levelheaded, and not really worried.

Q. Lamar, down the stretch of the season, you came out on the wrong end of some of these overtime games. What was going on today where you were finally able to break through and come out with a win?

LAMAR STEVENS: I think our non-conference and our conference play really prepared us for times like this, going through so many close games, coming out on the short end of the stick. I think it really prepared us. We learned from those mistakes. I feel like that's what enabled us to come out and get this win today.

Q. You didn't win a game in overtime heading into this game. Did that cross your minds at all? Was there any doubt?

MIKE WATKINS: Going into overtime, coach was just like, Keep fighting, keep fighting. As a team, that's what we went out and did. Not looking in the past.

LAMAR STEVENS: Like I said, I think our conference play in those really close games really helped us be ready for those situations, taught us how to learn in overtime. I think it showed today.

Q. Mike, today's performance, you set the record for rebounds in a Big Ten tournament game. How does this affect your confidence going forward for tomorrow and possibly beyond?

MIKE WATKINS: Well, me personally, if I bring the same energy, and my team bring the same energy, we

should come out good.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, fellas. We'll take questions for Coach Chambers.

Q. Coach, Shep has had an up-and-down season all year, then he had to come off the bench today due to an injury. What did it mean for him to make that three in the middle of overtime?

COACH CHAMBERS: I thought it was huge for Shep, for his confidence, for his teammates. You could see it, especially before the game, you could see it at halftime when they were shooting around. He looked good. He felt good. That experience of playing in the Big Ten these last couple years really shined through today. He gutted it out, for sure, because of his foot.

Q. Coach, I talked to you on Media Day. You told me how excited you were for your freshmen class. Through an entire season with them, what have you seen from them and how important are they to the future of this program?

COACH CHAMBERS: The growth and the maturity, again, it's not going to reflect in our wins, but the growth and maturity of this group, you could really see it, I can specifically see it, from all the Albany game all the way to today.

I mean, they've gotten a lot better. Their habits are stronger. They're more confident. They know exactly what we're doing.

That's only going to continue because they're very coachable. They want to find success. If we continue on this path, the future's bright for Penn State basketball.

Q. With this being an overtime game, you have a quick turnaround, how does your staff prepare for playing again tomorrow? What do you tell the kids on how to prepare beyond saying, Stay off your feet, get some rest?

COACH CHAMBERS: I actually met with our trainer and our strength coach. We formulated a plan of what we're going to do tonight, how we're going to help them with I'll just say cold tubs, get them fresh legs, make sure they're getting rest, hydrate. Again, off their feet. Feed them, as well.

It's a plan, for sure. I just told them, We'll do our job by watching Michigan State. You have to do your job. That's listen, get them in the pool for a little bit, get their muscles moving, then get ready to work.

Q. Talk about Mike Watkins, a double-double tonight. What does he bring to the team, his energy?

COACH CHAMBERS: Just in general about the growth of these freshmen. Over the last few weeks, I've seen a change in Mike Watkins. Got a long way to go, but I've seen a change. There's more consistent effort there. There's more willingness there. He's really starting to create some new habits. He knows he's the anchor of this defense. He knows when he rebounds the ball at a high level, and he's a great shot-blocker, obviously, that we typically win, that we find success.

The stat is, when we hold opponents under 70, we win. We went into overtime, and we still held them under 70, which is a great thing. Mike is a big reason for that. He's very coachable, very coachable kid. He is still learning and growing.

I'm excited for Mike.

Q. Back to playing again tomorrow. Did you learn anything from the Hall of Fame tournament earlier this year?

COACH CHAMBERS: I don't even want to think about that weekend, to be honest with you. We're a different team now. We're just a different team. We prepare differently. Our approach is different. Our mindset is different.

I'm just going to focus on what we're doing right here and right now.

Q. Talk about tomorrow. What do you have to do? What are you going to fix tonight to get ready for the game against Michigan State tomorrow?

COACH CHAMBERS: We got to play hard, defend, rebound, bring some energy. Everybody is going to tell them, How you going to be ready? They're 18-22. This is what they live for. They would rather not practice. They would rather play 30 games in 30 days. Trust me (laughter).

Hopefully these young legs are ready to play. It's the minds that we got to work on, make sure they're fresh. We'll do that.

Q. You called this game earlier today a big moment for your program. What kind of moment was it earlier this season when you played Michigan State, what kind of moment could it be tomorrow if you play a winning style?

COACH CHAMBERS: Yeah, Penn State basketball is inching closer, for sure. I mean, that was a huge win for us at the Palestra, so many levels. Today, to learn from past experiences from the Big Ten, to be able to not think those negative thoughts, come out and compete the way we did in that overtime, it just shows you the character of this team.

We don't have a senior on the team. That bodes very, very well for our future. We'll go out tomorrow, we'll compete. We'll get ready tonight. We just got to compete, have a great mindset, see what happens.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much. Good luck tomorrow.

COACH CHAMBERS: Thank you.