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Purdue - 64
Penn State - 59

An Interview With:

**COACH MATT PAINTER
RAPHEAL DAVIS
A.J. HAMMONS**

COACH PAINTER: Well, I thought this was kind of a typical, you know, tournament game. When it comes to playing in the half court, being able to play half court defense, it did worry me being down 11 at one time, just because there's fewer possessions in games like this, but our guys hung in there, and we really played well at the end of the first half to cut it to five. I thought that was a big stretch for us.

We've been able to start a lot of second halves and kind of have a flurry or have a run and make them call time-out. And when that didn't happen, we struggled a little bit for a couple minutes, and then we just kind of hung in there. It seemed like it stuck on one score for a long time. But I just thought our defense and our rebounding in the second half was really good. If you look at their percentages and what they shot, it was even or we were one up or one down at the half. And to be able to out-rebound them by nine for the game, I thought probably was the difference. But our half court defense was really good.

At times when the ball doesn't go in for us, we press a little bit, and we've got to do a better job of just being patient and moving the ball and making the defense break down. This was a huge win for us, and we're also very fortunate from the fact that this was Penn State's third game in three days. They've done an unbelievable job, and Pat Chambers is a great coach, great guy, and D.J. Newbill is very, very difficult to stop. You tell your guys to do certain things, and he still makes shots.

I thought Ray and Jon did a good job on him. With guys like that, we always want their shots taken, their total to be right around how many points they get, so he takes 18 shots and gets 19 points, and when you deal with someone that talented and that skilled, we'll live with that.

Q. Ray, just as Matt said, you made Newbill take 18 shots to get his 19 points. What was kind of working for you guys in terms of really making him work and containing him?

RAPHEAL DAVIS: I think just staying into him, and when he passed the ball, just try to make it hard for him to get it back. I think I went out the game, made some fouls, and Jon did an unbelievable job for the rest of the game. And hats off to him because he's a tough cover, he's a great player, and Jon stuck in there and he fought hard. I think Jon wore him out, and then when I got back on him, his legs weren't under him anymore. But just getting to him early and not letting him get many touches was big for us.

Q. Ray, how did it change the game when A.J. kind of stepped up the way he did, both offensively and then the way he was changing it defensively down the stretch?

RAPHEAL DAVIS: A.J. is a game changer on both ends of the floor. He was huge for us. I've been telling him since we were younger, you can change games whenever you want to. I went out and I told him, I pulled him aside, I told him it's time for him to take over, and that's exactly what he did. You could see by the way he played, his numbers and things like that, he was a big factor in today's game?

Q. Ray, are you okay after diving over press row, and what's going through your head and you're flying into the tables and computers and everything else?

RAPHEAL DAVIS: I was just trying to get

the save. I hope I didn't break anybody's computer, but I wanted to get the save and get the ball. I think it led to them turning it over, something like that, I think we got the ball back, so I was just out there trying to play hard.

Q. You guys had a huge rebounding advantage today, and at the end you had about a 90-minute possession where you came up with a few offensive rebounds. What was working so well on the boards for you today?

A.J. HAMMONS: Pretty much Coach stressed before -- yesterday when we was walking through, it was just stressing rebounding, rebounding. They got a couple key rebounds, a couple put-backs, and it was something we had to step up. Ray told me I had to step up. We just told everybody to make sure they boxed their man out. If I had to go block a shot, just come over there and help. We just need everybody to rebound and things, and that's what we did.

Q. A.J., can you talk a little bit about the match-up against Jordan Dickerson? He had a pretty good game overall today. Did he make anything difficult over there?

A.J. HAMMONS: He made sure I didn't go to the middle. He was just trying to take away middle so they could help on the baseline, so it was -- pretty much I just tried to push him up and really just get that baseline catch and then just go up with it and make sure I keep it high. It was just something he kept doing the whole game, making sure I couldn't go middle, I had to spin back into their help. So it was just -- so I'm just getting better position and then just hitting them first, and then we got the win pretty much.

Q. A.J., your team has a quick turnaround before you play Wisconsin. What's the biggest challenge for you going up against Kaminsky and going on short rest?

A.J. HAMMONS: Be ready as soon as the game starts. Be ready as soon as the game starts, rebound, make sure I have great close-outs, make sure I respect every player on the court because everybody can play.

Q. A.J., have you ever felt this confident on the floor before?

A.J. HAMMONS: Yeah, there's a couple games I felt confident. Not as much as just -- like, I know my teammates have trust in me to do something -- I put in the work, so I feel like the

shots should fall. It's just confidence level, I'd say my confidence comes from probably hitting a jump shot or something like that, more around the basket, so that brings my confidence up a lot.

Q. Ray, there was that stretch there the last couple minutes where you guys ran the shot clock down three consecutive times. How important was that to shorten the game that way? I don't know if it broke their spirit or whatever, but whatever impact it might have had on Penn State.

RAPHEAL DAVIS: Like I said, I think Jon did a great job. Coach said it before, I think Jon is one of the best rebounding guards in the country, if not the best. He got two huge offensive rebounds in that stretch and was smart enough to bring it out. He's a veteran guard. He was smart enough not to force anything and running another 30 seconds off, get another rebound, run another 30 seconds off, then I think we got another rebound, then we ran another 30 seconds off. Possessions like that, when you're on defense, you're just like -- you want to give into it. They're a good defensive team, but I don't know how many good defensive teams can be good in the half court for a minute and 30 seconds. I mean, I think they broke down at the end, and we got something good.

Q. I'd like to invite you both to answer this. Early season losses, they kind of -- they're hard to shake because people look at the résumé when they judge teams. Of course you won 12 Big Ten games, you're in the semis of the Big Ten Tournament. Do you feel like you're still having to prove that you're a good team, that you're worthy and all that?

RAPHEAL DAVIS: Just take it one game at a time. Those games are over with. Of course you're going to think back on them, but we're in March, so there's nothing we can do about it. Tomorrow is the biggest game of our season. We've got to look at tomorrow as the biggest game of our season. We can't worry about our résumé, we can't worry about the NCAA Tournament. We're in Chicago at the Big Ten Tournament, and our focus right now is on Wisconsin.

A.J. HAMMONS: Like Ray said, just pretty much the most important game is the next game. They're a hard team, and I feel like we do have something to prove. We started off last in the Big Ten, and we just worked our way up, so it's

something we've got to keep doing. Hopefully we make it.

Q. A.J., Ray's foul trouble in the first half, how did you guys adjust, and did that affect your play early on when you guys got down by 11?

A.J. HAMMONS: Just not having the Player of the Year out on the court, it hurts our team a little bit, but we've got great guys. Josh stepped up, gave us good minutes just defensively, and whoever switched off on him, we do a lot of switching, so whoever switches off on him did great. He was hitting shots over everybody that were contested, so we've got to live with those, but after really just -- we just had to keep rebounding.

Q. A.J., the conversation that Rapheal said where he told you he was coming up and you had to go in and step up, do you remember that, and did that sort of inspire you to go in and bring something else to the court?

A.J. HAMMONS: I'm not trying to take away from Ray, but no, it didn't inspire me. I heard what he said, but --

RAPHEAL DAVIS: I was just in the moment. I was in the moment. I've been around A.J. so long, I know when to say things to him and when not, and I knew at that point in time he wasn't listening, I just wanted to talk to somebody.

A.J. HAMMONS: No, I just knew I had to come out and step it up. We were down and Coach was getting on me a little just talking about rebounds, get better post position, make sure you run to the basket instead of block, so it was things like that. So my teammates was trusting me, they just kept passing the ball, so I knew I had to do something with it, and I did.

Q. Matt, were you discouraged at all back in December, Gardener- Webb, North Florida, were you discouraged at all, and do you feel differently about your team now?

COACH PAINTER: Well, sure, you're disappointed more than anything when you have some tough losses. But you can also learn from them and get better. You have a choice. We got picked 12th, I think, in the Big Ten, so it wasn't like people were saying, hey, you got picked third or fourth in the Big Ten and here's where you are. But I liked our team. I liked the makeup of our team, and even at that point.

To their defense, I was trying to play too many people and trying to really establish some depth. I had five freshmen. I had a guard that I knew was a good player. I didn't know what he was -- in Jon Octeus. You've got to understand he came on October 4th, and I wasn't playing him enough, and he really helps us rebound. Look today, he's a point guard, he gets 11 rebounds, he plays the whole game, he gets one turnover. He just does a lot of little things to help you win.

From that point on, I played Rapheal Davis more and I played him more and they're two good perimeter defenders. I thought Hammons really turned it on after the Illinois game, and that's really helped us in the later part of January and the whole month of February and March, and he's been really good. So the combination of those things has allowed us to play better since that point.

But we still beat BYU at NC State before those two losses, so a lot of people don't mention that. There's nothing wrong with mentioning it, but mention the positives too. When you see the talking heads talking about you got beat by these two people, well, mention the fact that we beat BYU and they're pretty damned good. Mention the fact that NC State, we beat them and they've beaten Duke, beaten Louisville, and they're really good. Even though they had a tough game yesterday, they're a really good team and they could do some damage in the NCAA Tournament.

That's what I kept telling our guys. When you're down and out -- if you're not any good, how did you beat BYU? If you're not any good, how did you beat NC? Just trying to drive some confidence in them and just be better defensively. We were possibly the worst defensive team in our league non-conference. Go look at the numbers, and we're possibly the best defensive team in our league. If we could rebound a little bit better, I think we would. There's just some games we don't do a good job rebounding the basketball.

Q. You might have mentioned this in your opening remarks, but did you feel like you needed to bring fatigue to the game seeing as how Penn State was playing the third game in three days?

COACH PAINTER: I thought it would come into play. If you look at their stat line, it's only three turnovers, so that's unbelievable. Playing three games in three days, they don't play

a lot of people. You have to give them credit because that's some discipline there of being able to play on that third day and not turn the basketball over.

I thought fatigue came into play. I thought that 90-second possession we had -- with the two offensive rebounds, I thought fatigue got in there. I thought we were just a little quicker to the basketball in that stretch. I thought they missed a couple shots that they had been making, especially in the first half against us. But I didn't think we brought it, I just thought it was there, because we don't play a lot of people at this point, either.

Q. What's the biggest challenge in facing Wisconsin on short rest, and what did you learn from the game up in Madison?

COACH PAINTER: Well, I think facing Wisconsin on any rest is a difficult task. I don't care if you have two weeks.

I think what we learned is the same thing we knew before. They're really, really talented. They can hurt you in a lot of ways. They have good size with versatility that can drive the basketball, they can post. They're probably the best team in the country in isolations and making decisions out of their isolations. He doesn't get the credit that he deserves in terms of what they're actually doing out there. Everybody just thinks it's a swing offense and it's a system, but those guys are in isolations 75 percent of the time. And then however you choose to defend those, they've seen it all, and they're great passers. And any time you have size that can dribble, pass and shoot and share the basketball and you throw a lot of skill around it, you're going to be dangerous to play against.

They have an explosion to them now with this group of guys that they haven't had before. They had a guy before that could go make plays. Now they've got a lot of guys that can go make plays, so it's a different -- it's not a traditional -- the traditional Wisconsin team is still really tough to go against. Now you're throwing the best player in the country in that mix. Sam Dekker is 6'10", he can drive the basketball, Nigel Hayes is 6'9", 240, he can dribble, pass and shoot, and then you have Bronson and Josh Gasser and I could go on forever. It's a tough cover. When you make mistakes, they score, and you have to be able to defend them, keep them in front of you, and then you can't allow second chance opportunities. If you're going to do that, then normally it's an early night for you.

Q. Penn State shot 27 percent in the second half. What was working better for you defensively, or did you feel like maybe they wore down a little bit? How do you look at what happened in the second half?

COACH PAINTER: I don't think there was anything different. I thought they made tough shots in the first half. I thought we had a couple breakdowns, but for the most part I thought they made tough shots. They didn't get fast break shots. Ross Travis had three offensive rebounds and I thought that hurt us, but I just thought those guys made some difficult shots, and then in the second half they didn't make as many.

Q. A year ago at this time people were asking about A.J., and you said he had to come to -- the next progression for him was going to be winning. How close did he come to fulfilling that this year, being an integral part of this team's success?

COACH PAINTER: I think he's done it. He's been someone we could count on, and that was something before. The frustrations that the media has or our fans have or I have with him is the same. Now he's consistent. And he'll have some bad nights here and there, but who doesn't. Who doesn't? He's been really consistent for us these last 12 games or so of the Big Ten and somebody that you can get the basketball to and not turn it over. You can rely on ball screen defense, on him doing what he's supposed to be doing, and then he's playing with some energy, and before it took like back-to-back good plays to get him going. Now he kind of gets himself going and he's ready to play and he's talking even maybe if a shot doesn't go down.

Q. An emotional ending to D.J. Newbill's Big Ten career. Do you see him playing at the next level at all?

COACH PAINTER: I think he has an opportunity. Any time you can put the ball in the basket like that -- he makes difficult shots, and he's just a flat-out scorer. Whether he can become a big point, play off the ball, I think that's going to be kind of a question. I think he can. I think he could be like a big point, more of a lead guard type guy, but any time you can put the ball in the basket like that and you've got a good, physical athletic frame -- he's going to be in a camp, there's no

doubt about it, and he'll get his opportunity. He might be one of those guys that's got to grind it for a year or two, find his way through overseas or the D-League to get there. Each guy has got a different journey, but there's no doubt he has the skill set to be right there. It's a close call.

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