

Maui Jim Maui Invitational

Wednesday, November 25, 2015

Dave Rice Ben Carter Ike Nwamu

UNLV Runnin' Rebels

UNLV - 72 INDIANA - 69

THE MODERATOR: We now welcome UNLV to the interview room. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach Rice.

COACH RICE: First, tremendous respect for Coach Crean and for the tradition of Indiana. First time since 1987 that these two teams have played, so there is a rich tradition with both programs. So we knew it was going to be a tremendous challenge. Indiana is one of the best offensive teams in the country, so we knew what we were up against, especially third game in three days.

Cannot be prouder of my group than I am. The response starting at halftime yesterday, the leadership of these two upperclassmen, halftime yesterday, when we were down 6 to Chaminade, and then the way we played for 40 minutes today. Obviously some execution issues we had to deal with.

But one of the reasons we came to Maui, other than it was exciting for our fans, in this prestigious tournament. Play against the best. See how we match-up. See where we're good. See where our deficiencies are, and now we'll have all next week to practice.

Could not be prouder of the character of our group. These two guys were instrumental. I just thought from start to finish we were engaged. We were together. Bench energy was fantastic. Our fan base was phenomenal. And we're excited to go home and spend Thanksgiving as a team together, practice, and get ready for a game on Saturday.

But, again, great respect for Coach Crean and the job he does. Game could have gone either way. We just made enough plays in the game to get it. Win or lose, I would have been extremely proud of how hard we played and what our response was.

Q. Ike, can you talk a little bit about how much the defense kind of triggered everything and got



everything going early in the game with a couple of early steals that led to slams by you?

IKE NWAMU: Coming in, we knew since Indiana is a great offensive team, we really had to lock down and play defense. It was really paramount for us to execute defensively, and those two players are part of that really, everyone doing their job.

Q. Hey, Ben, on that last play where they get the ball to Zeisloft on the three attempt, and the tip on the shot, how were you able to get there for that?

BEN CARTER: I knew my man set the screen. I knew they were looking for a three. I saw Pat was trailing his man a little bit, so I knew I had to help. Luckily I was able to get the tip on the ball and it was a pivotal play.

Q. Ben, when you came back and you were on this type of stage, is this kind of what you thought you wanted to be in terms of coming back to this program and helping it win and getting it to a tournament?

BEN CARTER: Oh, definitely. This is -- when Coach Rice recruits his players, this is what he tells us. We're going to play against the best because we want to be the best. We were looking forward to this trip all off-season, and unfortunately we weren't able to win our first game, but we can still say it was a successful trip. We won two and beat a ranked opponent.

Q. I wonder if you prefer your dad eating or dancing because he's very excited. Do you see him during games?

BEN CARTER: Oh, yeah. Who doesn't? I'll let you know that my dad is one of the biggest fans not only that I have, but our team has. He cheers for each and every guy as hard as he can. It was so special to be able to have him and my brother out here to support me during this trip. Obviously my mother wasn't able to attend, but for my father to be out here and have so much energy, I just try to feed off him because I think he had more energy than anybody else in that building.

Q. Can you talk about how much this win means for this team?

IKE NWAMU: It's huge. Because we knew what our goals are at the beginning of the year. To be able to play well against a very good ranked opponent, it just speaks volumes to our growth from where we first started this thing. So it was a good first test for us.

Q. Ben, same thing to you. Can you talk about the significance of beating a top 15 team?

BEN CARTER: That was our goal coming into this tournament to play against great competition. It was good for us to beat a ranked opponent. Obviously, this is just the beginning, because we have a lot more tough teams coming ahead in our schedule. But it was a great test for our team, and we responded well.

Q. Ike, I think this is the type of game that a lot of people were expecting to see from you and when you come to UNLV know that you're capable of. Was it completely different for you out there or were you getting some of the same shots and things just working better for you?

IKE NWAMU: Everything was just a product of in the flow of the offense and just playing off each other. We have a really talented group, so we're going to have people with good nights or different people with good nights on different nights. So I guess it was my turn this time. It was a product of us just playing together, really. It's not anything different like different types of shots, so, yeah.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach Rice.

Q. You talked all year about wanting to see the way that your team responds to the next game after a win or after a loss. I don't think a lot of people felt good even after the win yesterday. Talk a little bit about the response of your players for the full 40 minutes tonight.

COACH RICE: I think when you're a coach and you're around your guys all spring, all summer, all fall, you get a sense of where they are. I was very concerned after the UCLA game, and I was very respectful of Indiana but very confident that we'd give a great effort from start to finish today. I could tell we've got a big-game team.

I told them before the game, we've got a big-game team, and there is no doubt we have to play that way against everybody in our schedule, and that's what we'll work on. But when we play UCLA or Kansas, we have guys that step up and do a great job.

We have tremendous respect for what the tradition of Indiana is, but I knew we would give it everything we had and we'd play together. I just thought the chemistry of our group today was at an all-time high. This is a group that likes each other, spends time together, and you could see it today.

Q. Did you think Indiana was going to run with you? What was your plan of attack? Obviously you guys hit a lot of shots in the first half and got

out to a big lead.

COACH RICE: We anticipated that they would. If you look at the Ken Pom rankings, and all the analytic stuff, we knew it was one of the best teams in the country. It would be a high possession game. We knew we would have a hard time getting them stopped in transition. We knew we needed to score. And as much as defense was the key, probably as big a key today was making sure we played inside out and got some shots to go. Because if you're playing on your heels the whole game, if you're playing off your own misses or turnovers, you're in for a long day against Coach Crean's group.

Even though they shot a higher percentage from the floor than we'd like to have had them shoot, I think we forced turnovers against a very good group of guards. We forced 21 turnovers today, and that was a huge number. We got some run out baskets, and those one or two extra baskets were the difference in the game.

Q. You pressed full court and trapped some, but you pulled that off a little bit today. Was that because of Ferrell and Blackmon being such good guards, you didn't think you could turn them over too much?

COACH RICE: Yeah, it's all about Yogi Ferrell and the respect we have for him. The other thing too, we've got nine guys in our program averaging 15 minutes or more. And I suspected I would play Jerome and Pat more minutes today than I've been playing them over the course of the season. I didn't know if that was the case or not. So we wanted to press and trap off free throws and dead balls, and we want to pick up full court but not trap on made baskets.

Indiana is a very good press break team. They take the ball out with multiple guys and it's hard to get them stopped. At the end of the day, they've got one of the best, if not the best, quick point guards in the country in Ferrell.

Q. Indiana tied the game at 46 and then after that, 0 for 5, like three turnovers. How big was it right there? If they take the lead, then you don't know.

COACH RICE: These kind of games, it's so much about momentum. It's about a big stop here, a big basket here. We always focus on what happens at the end of the game. And that's obviously critically important. The big plays are when you're tied with 17 minutes to go in the game or you're up 6 and you don't score a basket. Or a chance with a three-pointer that gets to nine and a run out and cut it down to four. It's an entire game. That's why we focus on it's every play throughout the course of 40 minutes.

I just thought that we showed a lot of composure with

our group in terms of answering their runs, and they're going to make runs. We got up 13 late in the game, and they came down and we didn't close that very well in the first dribble hand-off three. Then they hit a transition three. They're just always a factor. You get so many shooters out on the floor. And again, we just had enough in the end to close it out.

Q. Can you describe the Ben Carter who left Las Vegas, and the one we saw today as a player?

When he left, what did you think?

COACH RICE: I think a lot of that credit goes to Grant Rice, my brother, and a lot of credit goes to Ben Altman. Ben Carter left Vegas and came back to Vegas a different player. He matured, he got better. Red-shirt year was huge for him.

Last year he obviously is a son of a coach. Maybe a guy, Coach Carter may dance a little bit, but he's a heck of a basketball guy. Ben just is a stabilizing force.

I went to Ben this morning, and I said, Ben, I know you've been starting. But for rotation sake, I need you to come off the bench. Okay, Coach, whatever you need me to do. When you have guys like Ben Carter who have been starting and in a big game like this, I say you're going to come off the bench and his response, 16 points and five rebounds, that's all you need to know about Ben Carter.

Yeah, just, it helps our rotations if I can bring Ben Carter off the bench. Just with our defensive rotation, defensive substitutions.

And Dwayne Morgan has earned the right to start. His energy level has been tremendous. Indiana starts with four three-point shooters on the floor, so it helps to switch four, so we can try to take away three-point shots. The biggest thing is we needed to get off to a great start. And Dwayne Morgan always brings energy.

Q. They went zone and Cornish did a quick three, but the next three possessions you found a gap. That has to make you feel good. They came out, but did it make you feel good they found gaps and attacked?

COACH RICE: Yeah, we were disappointed with our execution obviously against UCLA. We got off to a great start against UCLA and we didn't execute nearly as well against zone defense. So that's one of the other things coming to a tournament like Maui is all about, is we come and see what our deficiencies are, and there is no doubt we've got tomorrow off for Thanksgiving, a practice day Friday, and game Saturday.

Then all next week it will be zone offense, that will be

the primary focus of what we do. Because we're pretty good, as you see, in man-to-man offense. We can play inside out, and we have a lot of guys that can dribble penetrate the ball. We're going to see a lot of zone this year. So that's our job as coaches to put us in spots and play inside out against zone. But I thought we were a lot more effective zone offense today than we were during that stretch of the UCLA game.