

Maui Jim Maui Invitational

Tuesday, November 22, 2016

Greg Gard

Ethan Happ

Bronson Koenig

Wisconsin Badgers

Wisconsin - 73, Georgetown - 57

THE MODERATOR: Coach Gard is joined by Bronson Koenig and Ethan Happ.

COACH GARD: Obviously extremely happy for our players in terms of the effort that they played with tonight and how they kept picking each other up. Guys off the bench did a great job. Obviously the guy to my left was terrific on the glass. And the guy to his left really ran the show for us and did a great job, as great point guards do.

But I thought we played a little bit more or sounder basketball tonight. Not as good as we'll need to be in terms of the turnover ratio. But a step in the right direction obviously against a very good team. Like I said, just extremely proud of our guys and happy for them because they put a lot of work into this.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players.

Q. Ethan, you guys have been a good rebounding team this year, but outrebounded them 50-21 and 20-1 on the offensive glass. What was going on, why were you having so much success tonight?

ETHAN HAPP: Really just a lot of hard work. And I mean when you're tired you just gotta bust down to the block and get positioned before the shot goes up and, I mean, obviously clean up our end but then that just shows how much we're willing to work, that we were getting that many offensive rebounds, too.

Q. Bronson, can you talk just a little bit about the rebounding edge and how much that allowed the flow of the game to kind of get going for you as the point guard?

BRONSON KOENIG: Yeah, I thought everybody did a good job of working hard and trying to get position and just going to the glass every single time, whether they thought it was a make or a miss, everyone went to the glass.

And I thought Nigel and Ethan, couple of other guys, did great job keeping the tip-outs and everything like



that, just keeping the possessions alive and giving us second chances.

Q. Together you guys scored your team's first (indiscernible) points in the start of the first half, then did something similar in the second half. Can you both talk about the start of each half and what was clicking for you guys then?

BRONSON KOENIG: I just tried to come out and be aggressive. And this year I'm really just trying to stay on attack the whole game and just be consistently more aggressive, because that opens up everything else, not only for myself but for Ethan and kick-outs and stuff like that.

I thought Ethan did a good job in the first half of staying hungry. And there were a couple of hooks that didn't go quite his way, but I just told him at halftime to keep shooting them because they're eventually going to go in because he was missing by an inch.

So he listened to me and everyone saw what he did in the second half.

Q. Bronson, I'm sure there are things that you guys want to do better. But was this as close to a complete performance as you guys have had yet?

BRONSON KOENIG: Can you repeat that?

Q. I know you guys want to -- there are things you want to do better from this game, but was this as close to a complete performance as you've had yet this season?

BRONSON KOENIG: I would say so, yeah. I mean, it's still early in the season and everything. And it was against a really good team who is probably going to do really well in their conference.

And we had a lot of turnovers the first half, myself included, just some turnovers that can't happen in the future. But I thought we did a better job taking care of the ball in the second half, especially with the pressure they applied down the stretch. So, yeah, I thought we did a pretty good job the whole game.

Q. Bronson, can you just talk about the stand you made with the Dakota Pipeline back in September, and just what you guys are as a team and with your leadership are kind of allowed to do as far as

making statements like that?

BRONSON KOENIG: Yeah, we're college students, so we're kind of in the loop of everything. And with the social media age, you know, you can put something on video and everybody kind of knows about it, which is sometimes convenient.

And that's kind of how I learned about the pipeline protest and everything like that. And Coach Gard has given me full support and has been behind me since the few days before I actually went there, we talked about it.

The same goes with the team. They all have my back with it and they all support me 100 percent. And that's really a good feeling.

Q. Either of you, the second half, seemed like the fan support you guys had was elevated. What did you guys think of the fan support throughout this tournament so far, and when they played "Jump Around" on the PA and just everyone got into it?

ETHAN HAPP: I mean, it's amazing to see how well we travel and to have them there. And I mean not only be there but then be a presence like you're saying, to be loud when we need them to, and I mean I love it.

It was almost like a home game. So to have them come out all this way, obviously, is kind of a vacation for them but it's awesome that they're supporting us like this.

BRONSON KOENIG: Like Ethan was saying, I think at warm-up lines somebody said it's basically a home game for us because how many fans we had, and it's just really great to see that many Wisconsin fans coming out and supporting us here in Maui. And it was a great atmosphere, one of the best atmospheres I've ever been a part of here in Maui, the gym and everything else. And just really grateful for our fans.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. Did you think you could have that much of an advantage in rebounding? Was that an area you could exploit at all?

COACH GARD: Well, I think it's become the identity of this team. And there are times when it's not pretty. In fact, there's times when we will have to win ugly.

And that may be one of the areas where we can really make up with other deficiencies or deficiencies in other areas.

But I like the -- I think the bench and the use of the bench helps that because we can stay a little fresher and legs can still stay a little livelier. We stay on the

glass.

But it's something we've worked on and talked about and obviously the players have to do it. They're still the ones that have to perform, and I thought they were pretty relentless tonight in terms of really going after everything and being physical and on both ends of the floor.

Even when we tried to get the ball offensively shows the mindset, I think, of this group of how physical they want to play and the potential is definitely there.

I don't think we're where we need to be or can be anywhere near that yet. But tonight was definitely a step in the right direction, and obviously their rebounding shows the effort part of that, which has always been there. It's just a matter of trying to clean up and be more precise in other areas.

Q. Same type of question I asked Bronson, can you just comment on the statements that he and Nigel have made, and how much that means to the team and the university?

COACH GARD: The fact of the matter is that those two young men, specifically, have used their college education for something -- and their experience at Wisconsin -- for something way more than just playing basketball.

And when I sat down with both of them and talked about their specific areas, social injustice, obviously as Bronson mentioned before he went out to the Dakotas, why do you want to do this? What's the meaning behind it? And to hear him talk about the history of it, and he's not even a member of that tribe that's there. He's a member of the Ho-CHunk Tribe in Wisconsin.

But just to hear his knowledge base of the history, it was something that three, four years ago probably he didn't have the wherewithal to do. He didn't understand the situation and also understand the impact he could make.

I think that's what they both understand. The position they're in as highly visible college basketball players -- as I've always said everybody can point at problems around our country. Who can be a part of the solution? And I think that's the nice thing about Bronson spending that weekend out there. He was trying to be part of a solution and trying to help those people and be there and be supportive of those people that are, you know, at that pipeline.

So just proud of how he's used his education to expand his horizons. And the same thing with Nigel. They're way more than just basketball players, which all of our guys are.

To be at the University of Wisconsin you have to be a true student-athlete. And they both have embraced that role very well.

Q. I think you went the first 19 possessions of the second half without a turnover. Was that progress in your eyes? Did you just see better decision-making maybe --

COACH GARD: Yeah, I think we -- we went through all 18 from yesterday, last night with the team one by one, and talked about how it was on us. It wasn't really anything that the defense did to us, it was our decisions. And for a program that really prides itself historically on taking care of the ball, that wasn't going to be accepted. So they understood that and they are very aware of how important those possessions are.

And it's across the board. It's different things. Sometimes it's going too fast. Sometimes it's the type of pass we've made. But I thought tonight people played individual players played within the things they do well, their strengths. We didn't try to become somebody we're not, individually and as a team.

So we've got to get better. 13 is still too many in my eyes, and we have specifically things we'll point out and they'll know. There's some that are going to be acceptable based on the pace of play.

The only one yesterday that was acceptable I thought was the one that Nigel threw to Ethan on the fly down the middle of the floor.

I know there's going to be one or two of those. Timing wasn't quite right. But all the other 17 that were unacceptable. So we'll go through these 13 and continue to try to improve in that area. But I thought it was definitely a step in the right direction. It's a prideful group. They understand.

They know where our missteps have been before I ever have to say a word, and we've just got to continue to work and hold them accountable for their decisions. And they did a better job of that tonight.

Q. Can you speak to the Maui experience just being in this tournament? Obviously you're in the final, but what's the experience been like since you got here?

COACH GARD: Well, the experience -- I think this is my third or fourth time. I came actually to the Big Island with our Platteville team back in the '90s, stayed at the Navy base, and then this is the second time obviously to Maui with Wisconsin.

But the experience here is phenomenal. It's traditional

-- the tradition of this tournament, the location of it, I don't get a lot of time in the sun because when you keep winning, obviously you get three no matter what, but a lot of time is spent in front of a computer.

You can tell by my complexion, I'm not one that needs to spend a lot of time in the sun either. I get my money's worth pretty quickly when I'm out. But I know my family has enjoyed it immensely.

My two kids -- two of my oldest ones took the leap off the cliff. This morning I got out and watched that and took photographs. So they're enjoying it. Our fans are enjoying it. Tremendous competition. It's helping make us better as we get ready for the rest of our season. And obviously the hospitality and everything else is second to none.

Q. You have 19 second half points from Vitto and Khalil after they didn't even take a shot in the first half. Can you just talk about the second half contributions for them, especially for Khalil to bounce back after a rough first half and a couple of turnovers?

COACH GARD: Yeah, as I mentioned earlier, I didn't give specific names in terms of players that played within their lanes and did what they do well or didn't try to become or perform in an area that wasn't in their skill set. Both of those guys come to mind.

Vitto did what he does well. He did some good things defensively, was pretty active on the glass, made some good decisions on bounce passes around the rim and knocked down shots when he had the opportunity.

And Khalil, to do that type of job on Pryor, between Showalter and Khalil, how they defensively tag teamed off of each other, helped each other throughout that 40 minutes. But also Khalil stuck to things that he does well. And he's pretty explosive around the rim, obviously, and has a knack there. But has to continue to get better when he puts the ball on the floor of decisions and balance and jump stopping and those things.

So it was a matter of again trying to: Hey, made a couple of mistakes; let's get back and when you get back in there let's do what you do well, stay within the framework of the things that you're good at, and try to help your team the best way possible.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.