

March 24, 2013



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An interview with:



THE MODERATOR: We're now being joined by the head coach of Indiana as well as Hoosier student-athletes, Cody Zeller, Jordan Hulls, Christian Watford, and Victor Oladipo.

We'll start with an opening statement by Coach Crean. When he's finished, we'll open the door just for questions for the student-athletes.

COACH CREAN: First and foremost, in my mind, this is as tough a team we've faced all year long. You can see it on film. The film didn't do justice to how tough we are. When you play in the league you play in, it prepares you for this.

When you play the Michigan States and Ohio States and Wisconsins and Michigans and everybody in between, it gets you ready for tough battles.

Our guys in the second half, they never wavered on the belief they could and would win the game. We played defense the way we're supposed to play it for the entire game. We made life harder for as good a player as we've faced in my mind all year in Wyatt.

Our guys did a great job of continuing to believe, moving the ball, playing through everything that went inside of the game, and the biggest thing for us, is Temple could never get any separation.

If they got separation or maybe it's a little bit different, but they couldn't because our guys withheld that. It was just a matter of time, I think, the way our guys approached it, that things would

break for them. If we just continued to defend, if we continued to do our best job of taking Wyatt away, and we continued to get good shots and good ball movement and get the ball inside out on offense.

That's exactly what happened. The guys that are up here obviously for a reason did significant things in this game. Victor had a tremendous second half. Cody continued to battle through everything possible inside of the game and made big plays. But, frankly, we don't win the game without our two seniors right here.

And Jordan playing through some pain, making two big shots; Christian is rebounding and Christian's scoring. And most importantly, Christian's defense showed a toughness that he has. It was great that the country got a chance to see that because they're a really, really good team.

A couple of the key significant factors in this game, last six games from our estimations, Wyatt was getting anywhere from 46 percent, 47 percent of his points were coming off the foul line, and for us to keep him off the foul line was as big a factor as anything else today. For him to go 4-for-4 on that was huge. Because he obviously made shots in the first half, but we did a much better job in the second half.

The job did on O'Brien, the job did on Randall, those were big, big factors. And then how Christian locked down Jefferson when he was trying to get things going offensively for them were huge keys.

Just a win and an experience and an understanding of the game that's going to help us move forward without a doubt. I'm proud of the way every one of them played.

Q. Victor, just talk about the 3 at the end. You guys are 3-for-12 at that point. Just talk about the confidence to even take that shot.

VICTOR OLADIPO: When the game is in movement and we hit Cody in the post, people get open shots. I was just moving without the ball.

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Cody found me, and I was open, and I just pretty much shot the ball.

I was just open, and I shot it. It really didn't have anything to do with the moment or the confidence to shoot it. I just caught it and shot it. I didn't think about it.

I think that's when I struggle is when I think about shots.

Q. Christian, could you talk about the challenge that they seemed to throw at you late in the game. They seem to want to isolate you on the guy bringing up the ball.

CHRISTIAN WATFORD: I just tried to get up and just keep my chest in front of him. I don't know if they were trying to isolate, but that's what it seemed like. I just tried to keep him outside the elbows and just tried to challenge, play solid defense.

Q. Christian, just what did you see on that block? I think it was Lee down low. You kind of recover him quickly out of the trap, and Wyatt just flung the ball there under the basket.

CHRISTIAN WATFORD: Cody and Victor blitzed a high ball screen. I was on the weak side, and I was kind of pushed up too much, and Wyatt put enough air on the ball for me to get it, and I got in at the end and challenged the shot, and I blocked him.

Q. Jordan, how is your shoulder? And just kind of what is your condition?

JORDAN HULLS: My shoulder is good. I'm sure it will be a little sore, but nothing too serious. You'd have to do a lot more to me than that to keep me off the floor in this kind of situation. My teammates had confidence in me, and I was able to knock down some shots in the second half.

Q. Victor, obviously, you knew the brackets would potentially take you to Washington, D.C. What does it mean to you to actually be going home and playing the next game in front of family and friends?

VICTOR OLADIPO: It's a great feeling. I'm just glad that we're going. We want to be successful there. So it's going to be fun playing in front of family and friends and all that, but it's a business trip. We're on a mission.

Q. Cody, talk about -- you guys are able to hang around the whole second half, but then you scored the final ten points of the game,

and they didn't score in the last 3:09. Just talk about how this team was able to make big plays when you needed it.

CODY ZELLER: That's what we've been doing all year. We've been in a lot of close games throughout the Big Ten especially. We've got a mature group that, even though it wasn't going as well, we wouldn't get things going for a while, but that's what winners do. You've got to survive and advance this time of year.

We got some big plays down the stretch and lucky we're moving on.

Q. Cody, Coach mentioned how Temple is a difficult team and a tough team. Can you just talk about the toughness you saw inside from them and the difficulty that they were giving you?

CODY ZELLER: Yeah, they were a tough team. They weren't as big as some of the other Big Ten teams we played against. Toughness makes up for a lot of that. I thought for sure I was going to set a turnover record with all the mistakes I was making.

My teammates had a lot of confidence in me and kept on throwing it to me. Luckily, we could make a few plays down the stretch. Like we said earlier, they are a tough group; a lot of credit to them.

COACH CREAN: Don't worry, Cody. We wouldn't have let you set the record. We'd have got you out of there before the record was set.

Q. Just want to ask about the 3 again. What was going through your mind after the ball goes in? What were you saying during that time? Looked like you were kind of on your own a little bit. What were you saying at that point?

VICTOR OLADIPO: I can't even remember. I was just kind of filled with emotion. Just credit to my teammates, especially these seniors to my left, and especially the bench. They did a phenomenal job today.

Without them, we can't win. That's pretty much it.

Q. Christian, I know your shot against Kentucky last year was big and important part of Indiana's progression last year as a program. Was your blocked shot today, given what was at stake, and given that you're a

senior, was that a bigger play than that shot was?

CHRISTIAN WATFORD: Definitely, I feel like that. My motivation is to play with these guys as long as possible, and I'm willing to do whatever it takes in order to keep playing. I just want to play till we can't play no more.

I feel like it is right now. So that's just how I feel.

COACH CREAN: Think you can sell as many pictures of that?

Q. Victor, at any point did you flash back to last year's VCU game, and did you see similarities?

VICTOR OLADIPO: No, I didn't really think about last year's game. I was just thinking about getting big stops and slowing Khalif down. He had a great game. He's one of the toughest matchups I've ever had this year.

He did a phenomenal job of scoring the basketball, so I was just trying to limit his touches and make him not catch it. I think I did a pretty good job of that in the second half. I wasn't the only one who was guarding him, so credit to Will Sheehey, Remy Abell, Christian got on him a few times, even Cody was on him; just throwing different bodies at him.

It's not a one-man show. Without my teammates, we couldn't have slowed him down.

Q. I was going to ask the same question, but as far as guarding Wyatt, what were you able to do better, say, in the last ten minutes than maybe not so much at the beginning?

VICTOR OLADIPO: Just make it hard for him to catch the ball, and I think that's pretty much all I did a pretty good job of. In the first half, I was letting him catch it easy and just letting him have a comfort game. He was comfortable.

In the second half, we kind of limited his touches and made it hard for him to even move. So we just did a good job of that in the second half.

Q. Victor, you talk about the assignment of guarding Khalif Wyatt, but what elements of his game make him such a tough guard to guard?

VICTOR OLADIPO: He plays at his own pace, and nothing, nothing speeds him up. It doesn't matter who you put on him. He's going to play at the same pace. That's why he's such a good guard.

He does a great job of creating space for himself and getting his angles to the rim essentially. So he's a great player, and he's going to be a great player in the future as well.

THE MODERATOR: Christian, Cody, Jordan, Victor, thank you. Good luck against Syracuse.

Questions for Coach Crean.

Q. Coach, kind of the same thing I asked Victor. How did that game against VCU in the tournament last year help your guys tonight?

COACH CREAN: We went to a play that we ran late in that game that really put a little karma with that, I guess. There was a play we ran off the elbow that we got a big foul on late, when we were making our comeback that we put in after a time-out last year against VCU, and we scored on it a few times.

So that crossed my mind. Other than that, I'm not sure it's that just as much as the fact that these guys have been through so much. You're never sitting over there talking about are we going to win the game? This is what we have to do, and you keep all doubts out of their heads, and you keep them focused, and most importantly, they keep themselves focused on what's most important, which is the next possession.

But there's one. There was one, in answer to your question, we went to that play, and it felt good to get something out of it like we did last year.

Q. After the game you entered Temple's huddle and said a few words. What did you say in there?

COACH CREAN: I have great respect for great competitors, and it was an opportunity. I haven't always been great after the end of games, but that one I did because they just happened to be standing there, and they were all there together, and I have -- those kids -- those young men don't know me, and I really don't know them, but I have unbelievable respect for them because I have great respect for their coach.

I just told them that they were as tough a team as we had seen all year, and they played against great teams, and we played against great teams, and they're as good as any of them. It was an unbelievable honor to go battle with them.

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Q. At any point in the second half did you think about maybe throwing a jump defense up there --

COACH CREAN: Absolutely.

Q. -- box and one, triangle --

COACH CREAN: Not box and one. No, because when you do that, you have the risk of Jake O'Brien being back in, and I think it was a huge key that Jake O'Brien didn't get going in this game. He's their second leading scorer, and we've seen firsthand what he can do.

Definitely, we had things we were ready to go to early, but at the same time, the fact that Jefferson and Lee were playing so well and making shots changed that a little bit.

So, no, we were doing a much better job. We were playing -- we needed to do a better job early of making it harder for Wyatt to get comfortable. That doesn't mean being in all-out denial, unless it's at the shot clock, but it was just too comfortable.

I thought the guy that stemmed the tide in the first half, which is why he got the start in the second half, is Remy Abell. That was the key.

We had some things that I could have gone to, but I just chose not to.

Q. Tom, even if you didn't verbalize doubts, obviously, there's a feel about this program this year that this could be a special season. I was curious, with five minutes to go in the game and you guys are still trailing, if in your mind at all you're thinking, I wonder if this is just how it ends today?

COACH CREAN: No. I think about that before the game. The games are -- before the games starts, it's always miserable for me. I'm sure it is for a lot of coaches. This time of year, it's even more so.

But those -- you've got to purge yourself of those doubts, and it's so hard. You just pray and try to get all that negativity out of my head.

Yeah, I don't want it to end. I really don't. I love being around these guys. They're as smart and cerebral and tough minded of any group I've ever been around. Certainly, those things go through my mind, but not during the game.

Q. Coach, are there any Big Ten teams that you thought Temple was most analogous to? And could you explain a little bit how that brutal --

COACH CREAN: You've got to explain that word to me because I have no idea what that word means.

Q. Similar to. And could you also explain how the brutal Big Ten schedule prepares you.

COACH CREAN: The Big Ten, first and foremost, prepares you. I've said it before, but it's the truth, everything and anything. It prepares you for tough possession-by-possession battles, which is what today turned out to be.

We use examples of players, like certainly the one with Wyatt would have been (Michigan's) Trey Burke, and in preparing for him, Jake O'Brien would have been potentially a Tyler Griffey back in Illinois. There were certain aspects of their team, but the way they get after the glass, our comparisons there would be Michigan State, Minnesota, Ohio State.

Would I say that they -- would there be one team that they would be compared to? I don't know if I would say that. I know this: If they were in our league, they'd be fighting for a championship too, and I don't think there's any doubt about that. They're that good.

Again, we felt like that. They were beating NC State 38-22 the other night. They're really good. The more film we watch, them winning at Syracuse, the way they played at Kansas, outside of really the Duke game, every game was just an incredible battle for them, and they found ways to win close games.

That's when you're most concerned about. Those are the things that go through your head more than anything else is this team knows how to win close games, but so does ours.

Q. Right after the game, your first emotion, is it more relief, or is it joy?

COACH CREAN: That was relief tonight. That was relief. I didn't have a lot -- I had emotion at halftime. I didn't have a lot of emotion during the game. We needed to play better.

It wasn't like walking in the locker room, jumping up and down. I want them to be excited but also to understand what we're playing for. There were a lot of different games going on in the game tonight. There was our start. There was the middle of the second half. There was how we ended -- there was the middle of the first half. There was the end of the first half. Then there's

how we played in the second half.

But I'm proud of their maturity because I don't think an immature team has a chance to win this game. So the maturity that they've gained is fantastic. It's more relief. It's not relief because we dodged a bullet and feel pressure about what's in front of you, it's more relief because we finally got through this is the biggest thing for me personally.

Q. You guys got about five or six stops at the very end of the game. Are there some specific drills, things that you do in practice, that translate to moments like this in particular?

COACH CREAN: Absolutely. Three stops in a row. We'll play three stops in a row, three scores in a row type of game, to maybe three or four. So if the defense gets three stops and they get three scores, that's like they've got two.

And you don't get a point unless you've got three in a row. It becomes very competitive. That is -- that three stops in a row thing is just absolutely huge for us. That and deflections are just such a barometer of how you're playing and what your winning is like.

That would be a big one for us. Then there's some shot clock, half-court games, that we play and finishing the clock out, whether it be four-on-four -- four-on-four especially. Those type of drills are really good. I think they transfer over.

Q. Tom, what led you to decide to go to the face guarding with Vic in the second half, and when it worked, what was it that convinced you to give him some possessions off and use Remy and Will?

COACH CREAN: I think the bottom line is we just had to make -- all night long we wanted to make it difficult for him to get the ball, and we didn't do that. We didn't do that at the start. Then it was going to be about not letting him get the ball back at the shot clock because he's such a great shot clock player.

Again, to us, it wasn't going to be as much about the matchup as it was to keep him just in front, playing the way we wanted to. We made an adjustment near the end of the game on playing him more chest to chest when he had the ball. But it really became more about, if he can't catch it, he can't shoot it. So let's do everything we can do from the very beginning to not let him get it.

And then just keep an eye on those guys and read them. He's that good. The game called for that to happen, and it wasn't like, well, let's just

hope he cools off. No, we've got to do everything we can do to keep him from catching the ball.

Q. When a player gets off to such a hot start like Wyatt did today, what do you do to keep the momentum from spreading to the rest of the team and keep them at bay or keep your team going?

COACH CREAN: You don't panic. You keep moving your matchups around, but I think, if you go to a different defense too early, you could be showing panic to your kids, but most importantly, you could be allowing somebody else to hurt you.

Again, the game is close. It's not like Victor Oladipo or Will Sheehey are bad defenders. We just weren't playing him correctly, and we tried to make our adjustments.

Now, if the game starts to slip and other guys are feeling really hot, then it becomes a situation where you've got to do something a little bit differently. When the game is close in balance right there, it's not about, well, if we just go to this box and one or triangle and two, you don't want somebody else getting hot at that point.

Those are the biggest things to me. You want to have different things in your arsenal that you can go to, but most importantly, you want to have your principles at some point come back and really help you the best. And tonight in this game they did.

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