

March 22, 2014



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An interview with:



THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: First of all I want to congratulate Michigan State. They certainly are an incredible basketball team. I think we talked about going into this game, how talented and balanced that their ball club is. I thought that they were coming together and jelling very well. You saw that on display, I thought, very early in the first half.

How explosive they are, they got out in transition, and I thought that was really one of the bigger keys. That they put us on our heels right away and then, certainly, put us in a big deficit and a big hole. I can't say enough about our team and the effort and the guts that they showed in the second half to make a run, to take the lead, to play with so much composure and poise and fight. I was so proud to see that happen. They have played that way all year for our program. We have had an amazing season. These three kids up here right now, with what they did, certainly this evening was outstanding. I'm proud of our program, proud of our team.

But certainly we want to congratulate Michigan State and how they played and certainly the way they played and especially in the interior

and transition. I thought they just got the ball inside so early, and up the floor in transition, and was very explosive. So just a wonderful effort by our team, but certainly you got to play perfect basketball to be able to pull a game out like that, being in a deficit that we were.

Q. Brandyn, I know it's hard to process so fresh off the situation, but just -- when you're down 16, just how much of it was you put a charge into and sparked the run, but how much of that was I'm not going out this way?

BRANDYN CURRY: It was just being my last game, I said at halftime I told the guys that we just need to fight. We were down in a big hole and I felt like just the first half that just wasn't us out there. So, we just rallied together and me, personally, I had the shots and Wesley and Siyani did a great job of finding me. Coach told me to step up and take our shots and that's what I did. And I'm just proud of the effort our team had in the second half to just fight all the way to the end like that.

Q. Wesley, talk about that run a little bit. It was actually in transition that you were getting a lot of those baskets.

WESLEY SAUNDERS: Yeah, we were just trying to get out early in transition. They're a great transition team too, and they're big inside. So, we thought if we could get up the court and try to score some things before they got set up, it would be beneficial for us.

We just were able to knock down some shots and we were able to lock in on defense a little bit to chip away at the lead.

Q. Steve, a lot was made about their size and how long and how athletic they are. But for you, you got in there, got a couple of dunks to charge your team up. How much did it get to a point where it's like I'm pushing back, I don't care how big you are.

STEVE MOUNDOU-MISSI: Obviously,

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after the first half we felt like we didn't play great and the second half was all about our effort and fight. We wasn't going to go out like that. I thought we did a pretty good job as a team to fight. They're a really good team, obviously inside. They have great players. It was a tough fight.

Q. Brandyn, when you first came, it was the first year that Harvard made the post-season and the CTI. Fast forward to this year. It's not even that much of a surprise when you pull off the upset against Cincinnati. Can you talk about how you've seen this program grow and how you feel you've left it as you head out?

BRANDYN CURRY: Yeah, obviously, I think the program has grown tremendously. I think it speaks volumes to Coach Amaker and his staff and the work they put in to first, to recruit all of us and bring that vision to us. The biggest reason I came here is because of Coach Amaker. I remember his visit to my high school, he talked about making history at Harvard, changing the program and making it into one that's recognized like this.

Yeah, it's no surprise to see us come this far. I'm happy to see it finally come true and now that it's coming to an end. I'm just very proud of all the work that's went in and this is a testament to the great guys that we got and the good things that we're going to continue to rebuild, I mean not rebuild but keep going along. We got great players coming in, we got great young talent and with Coach Amaker's created here, it's just a wonderful thing.

Q. For anybody, same subject, if there were questions about whether or not you guys belonged, do you feel like you answered those questions tonight?

WESLEY SAUNDERS: Yeah, definitely. We just came out and fought our hardest and that's really all you can ask sometimes, no matter what the scoreboard says. I think that we showed some people that we have the heart of a champion out here.

Q. For any of you, when you made that run, you take that lead, were you hoping at that point that they might cave? That's the first time they have been challenged like that in a few weeks since they have been on this dominant run. Were you curious to see how they responded? Can you talk about their

response when they went on that 8-0 run right there?

BRANDYN CURRY: Yeah, that was definitely one thing we wanted to do, was put game type pressure on them. We felt like so far in that game that we hadn't really challenged them. It was kind of easy for them with all the shots and layups they were getting. So, we wanted to really challenge them. And they responded like great teams do. They didn't lose composure, they came down, I think, it's twice to hit a really clutch three. Because it's easy for, at that moment, where they have been winning the whole time and we make that big run for a team to cave in.

And that's just a sign of a great team. And that's what they are. Coach Izzo, Michigan State, they always have a great team and they showed it right there.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse you to the locker room and take questions for coach.

Q. Can you talk about the decision to go small and why you thought that would be effective in the second half and ultimately, why you stuck with it.

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: We were changing and tinkering with lineups to see what could give us a certain kind of production that we needed to scratch and claw back in it. I thought that group was terrific on the defensive end, first of all. That's what we were looking for, to get stops. I thought that group in particular really gave us the effort that we needed. They got out in transition as Wesley said, we tried to see if we could get some things up the floor early. We spaced the floor a lot better being smaller. I thought Steve's play was outstanding. I thought he battled on the interior there and made a big steal on sideline right in front of our bench and hit it down the floor and went in and dunked it. It was a huge play.

But, we wanted to stay with that group. That group was the group that obviously, got us back into it and made the run and we were hoping that that group is going to be able to bring it home for us.

Q. Aside from X's and O's and strategy, was there anything you said or anything that happened that sort of sparked you guys in the second half?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: With

Brandyn, I thought he was very passionate at halftime. We came out the second half and we had a lot of great shots right away. We just couldn't make them. We didn't knock a few shots down.

It was very disappointing for us, because we really thought we could get out in the second half and get a -- we had the ball to start, get a score, a stop and another score and see if we can change the complexion of that game quickly at the beginning of the second half.

But, I thought Brandyn's talk at the half -- we talked about how we were better than that. As good as they are, we were still better than what we played in the in the first 20 minutes. And it was important for us to remember who we were and who we have been all year.

I thought they responded incredibly well, as you saw, and certainly battled. And as Brandyn just said, you give a lot of credit to Michigan State. It's easy for a team to kind of give in right there when things kind of went south for them, and we had the momentum and they didn't. I thought that they're a tough basketball team and Harris and Trice and those kids, they made some big 3's. Valentine, they made some big shots to put us back in a deficit.

Q. The topic that's not going to go away, the season's over for you now, have you made any plans on your future or anything?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: No, I have not. My future's always been, I'm happy at Harvard and I don't speak on other situations as I said earlier. And I don't know what else I can say about that, especially at a moment like this.

Q. How important this time of year is it to have Seniors and some veterans that have kind of been through the run of things a couple times?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: I thought that was the reason why we were able to have the kind of season we had all year, because of the veterans. We have been an experienced ball club to win our conference for four years and three outright. These older guys know what it takes and I thought they showed that a lot in this particular game. They showed it, certainly, in our previous game and how we needed to close out the Cincinnati game being tough down the stretch.

But I'm very, very proud of our veterans and proud of our seniors. I thought they were an amazing group for our program and our school.

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They left an incredible mark with Harvard basketball and our University as a whole.

Q. Same as I asked the guys, there were people who said Michigan State was on just a different level, but if there were questions about whether or not you guys belonged, you guys can play with teams like this, did you think that you answered them?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: I thought our kids competed. We knew we would. We certainly were knocked back at the beginning and how quickly they were able to transition down the floor and we turned the ball over. I didn't even mention that, but that really put us in a hole where they got so many transition baskets, but, certainly, they're talented. They're explosive, talented, we knew that. They're very balanced. But, I think we're a ball club that people recognize that it's a darn good basketball team.

Q. When you guys started to make that run, you were getting emotionally fired up on the sideline. What was the moment like when you guys took the lead for you?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Well, we knew we had a long way to go, but certainly for us to battle all the way back and grab the lead, that's when you want to see if they can change things on the other side. Sometimes a team can kind of get all the way back and kind of tie it or maybe one possession and never get over the hump. We have seen it before where if you can just get the lead, things can maybe change. We certainly got to that point and the mark of an outstanding basketball team, which is what they are, they settled in and made the clutch plays that they had to make.

Q. Talk about Kyle, who didn't play the last 18 minutes and what he's meant to the program and kind of his struggles tonight?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Yeah, I thought it was a tough night for Kyle. But Kyle has been an amazing player in our program for his four years. The numbers speak for themselves. He was one of the more important kids for us to try to recruit to come to Harvard, given the status in New England, and how terrific of a player and a kid he has been, and his up bringing, and all the things that we need to have for our team and, certainly, for our University.

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He's Rookie of the Year, he was first team all conference, he's been a part of some great things here with our basketball program. I'm very, very proud of Kyle, as with all our Seniors and certainly we, in terms of not playing as much tonight, we went with that group that really battled for us and made a run at this particular game. And we stayed with it and rode that group as long as we could.

Q. Two questions, one sort of a basketball one. Has a team sort of made it that difficult for Laurent this year? He didn't get a clean look until the shot that put you guys ahead and how much of a, how much of a problem was that? And then two, sort of in the same vein with Kyle, but this is kind of a weird year, a different kind of year with Brandyn and Kyle coming back. And then they're going to be gone after this, is there any way to put a perspective on sort of transitioning without them and sort of what they meant to the program and what you got coming in?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: We'll get a chance to reflect on a lot of things, obviously now that our season is concluded, but we recognize that the contributions of the Seniors. They have -- you can't say enough about them. And you can see the importance that they have had and the mark that they have set for this program and the bar that they have set.

It's no doubt that we have a lot to -- a lot of players behind them, we have a lot to look up to and to strive for. Kyle in particular. You mentioned Kyle and Brandyn coming back and how they were so anxious to fit in with everything and they were a part of things. Their attitude and their spirit was amazing. We wouldn't have had the kind of year that we have had if those kids didn't embrace who we needed them to be returning. I'm so proud of how they have handled everything while they were gone, certainly how they were able to come back and how they performed all year for our program and for our school.

Q. Laurent. That's all?

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Yeah, I'm sorry about Laurent. Yeah, didn't get a lot, which you know what? When he's that good of a shooter and you can imagine how tough it is for Laurent at times when people are just not going to leave him. That's probably the right strategy, and, but we certainly found him at times that he was open and that's what we're supposed to do.

But, I thought the other guys did a terrific job. And Brandyn was a big key for us being able to kind of come in and give us a lift offensively and what he was able to do to stretch the defense as well and knock down his open shots.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, coach.

COACH TOMMY AMAKER: Thank you.
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