

March 14, 2013



Nebraska – 57
Purdue – 55

AN INTERVIEW WITH:

**COACH MATT PAINTER
D.J. BYRD
RONNIE JOHNSON**

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead with an opening statement from coach.

MATT PAINTER: Obviously a very tough loss for us. I thought we did a better job of taking care of the basketball. We outrebounded them. We just didn't do some simple things especially well in the second half.

We really played pretty good basketball here the past couple weeks and with that we did a better job with our shot selection and making decisions in terms of taking a good shot.

We had to battle back, I just thought Nebraska was a step quicker than us most of the night. But we battled back and got it to two possessions. And then we went about four-straight possessions in the middle of the second half where we took two horrendous shots and had two turnovers. That was a key time of the game, even though we got back into the game and had a chance to win the basketball game, those four possessions in a row really hurt us. And then we had some breakdowns and missed some free throws. And then had the one rebound on a missed free throw that everybody

seemed to box their man out and not go get the basketball. And that crushed it.

But you have to give them credit, I thought Shavon Shields was great in the first half. He played like a senior, played like an experienced guy. So give him credit. If you would have told us that we would have took their two best shooters and they would have had nine and five, I would have said we would have won this game. But obviously we didn't. But give them credit. They outplayed us.

THE MODERATOR: Take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. For both of you, to start the second half you pulled within two right at the end of the half and they got off, I think and scored the first nine points of the second half. What at both ends did you see went wrong in that stretch, because you were playing uphill the rest of the way because of that 9-0 run.

D.J. BYRD: Offensively I just thought that we could have got some better looks, took some better shots down the stretch. But we just had to run the offense. And you didn't really know if they were going to switch on some down screens on some of the guys. I guess give credit to them. They made it tough on us. But that 9-0 run we had to be able to crack down and get some stops and we didn't.

RONNIE JOHNSON: I thought we were digging ourselves in a hole pretty bad. They were scoring and then we were throwing up bad shots. So that's not what you want when you're trying to win.

Q. D.J., this team has played so well the last three weeks and then you got back into this one, but you fall short. You're two games under .500. I know as a senior you talked about wanting to continue to play basketball. It's not in your hands now, but do you feel like this team is still deserving of some kind of post-season opportunity?

D.J. BYRD: I believe so. The way we played the past couple weeks, Michigan and Minnesota, and we had some good games and played hard. And we came up short in some big games too. So for me, I always want to play some more games, but it would be great if we could.

Q. Ronnie, in the game out in Lincoln, you and Terone were able to get in the lane and get some of those floaters. Terone had an especially good night. And they talked about how they were able to plug that up this time. Did you sense from early on that it was going to be more difficult with Ubel in there for you and Terone to penetrate and get those floaters like you've been doing so often lately?

RONNIE JOHNSON: I thought so. They guarded the ball screen a bit different than Wisconsin did. They had a hard hedge, whereas, Wisconsin, you could get in the lane pretty easy. And they kind of stayed on our hands instead of my left and my brother's right. So it was just kind of hard to get in there and make those plays.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, guys. We'll take questions for coach.

Q. Same thing, so much -- you talked about this year, good things happen when you're able to get into the paint. It just didn't seem like it came as easily tonight. From a strategical standpoint, talk about what they did that made it so difficult tonight to get in there?

MATT PAINTER: Really not anything different than what other people do. They packed it in. When you face

different teams that do that, you just have to show some discipline and put them on defense and break them down.

We didn't do that. We were too eager. I didn't think we did a good job of moving. I thought we had to move them more. Any time you move them more, you usually spread them out more. And we just didn't have good ball movement, we didn't cut hard, we did too much watching. That's something we really worked on this past month. And it's a shame that you get in a close game like that and you can't do a better job of disrupting their offense.

Q. You went with Sandi [Marcius] at critical times in the second half. What did you see from him tonight that you liked?

MATT PAINTER: I thought he played hard. He gave us a spark there. He had six rebounds in 14 minutes. And obviously A.J. [Hammons] scored the basketball.

But in that one stretch A.J. had the turnover and then he had a couple shots right there at the basket and he had already been out there about three or four minutes. So it was just a natural rotation where I was going to sub him out anyway and Sandi went in and got rebounds for us and gave us some energy. So we stuck with him.

He's done a really good job for us. A lot of times when guys get out of the rotation they get down, they get a bad attitude, and Sandi's had a great attitude when he got out of the rotation and he's kept fighting and he's really helped us here the past couple weeks.

Q. That final possession turned into a scramble. Who were you hoping would get that shot away?

MATT PAINTER: We were doing -- we did the same thing we have been

doing before with [D.J.] Byrd getting those shots, except that Terone [Johnson], we wanted him to get in the paint, because we didn't need a three. We wanted him to get in the paint and try to draw a foul or get to the rim. And we didn't get a good ball screen. You go back and watch the tape, he didn't get a good ball screen right there. He got a contested shot.

Obviously, he got it back and had another contested shot there. You would like to get a little better look. But we had the ball in the right guy's hand.

Q. You talked at Illinois in the game about a month ago how you were tired of hearing that you're a young team. What do you take from this last month moving into next year with your team being so young?

MATT PAINTER: I thought that the improvements we made here in the past two, three weeks, I thought that should have been where we were in late December, early January. It just took us a while to figure it out.

Then when things don't go our way -- the Wisconsin win was a great win, obviously, but we were down 13, 14 points in the game and came back and won. So you see it in games like this right here where we get down, we really struggle to handle adversity. We have done a better job with it, but the missed free throws, the missed opportunities, the breakdowns, they didn't actually answer the question about the start of the second half. It's just an immature approach to coming out in the second half. And maybe some shots don't fall for you, but you still do your defensive assignment, you don't get back boarded out of the corner, you stay tight on a screen. You do what you're supposed to do. They make tough shots, you shake their hand.

We had some mental breakdowns. We weren't ready to play. I wish I could

blame it on our young guys, but we just didn't have a group that could stay in it. It was great to see how they improved at the end of the year, but this right here we had too many situations, opportunities where it seemed like we were backing down from where we played most of the year, especially against good competition.

Q. I asked D.J. [Byrd], you said on Monday you would play exhibition right now. Tonight's a little bit of a bummer for you, but do you still hope that somebody will come calling next week for some post-season opportunities?

MATT PAINTER: Well, sure. But it's also one of those things where I want our guys to be in the right frame of mind. Because I want to do it, but I don't play. So they can say what they want, but you got to be able to give your word that you're going to go out there and fight and take it serious and go out and try to win the game if you get that opportunity.

Q. This is the first time in awhile that you're not looking ahead to the NCAA tournament. Where do you go from here? How critical is it looking ahead into the summer going forward?

MATT PAINTER: It's like any other year. Obviously, it's disappointing that you're not going to play the NCAA tournament. But we go back and we assess where we are, evaluate each guy, evaluate our team, do our best to evaluate what's coming in. Because we need to recruit and try to get some things fixed.

We just have to be more into it in terms of having 12-month guys. You can't get in situations -- we got to get a more skilled guy, in my opinion. The year before we weren't as talented as we were before, but we took care of the basketball and we always gave ourself a chance. And this year we didn't do that at times.

And then you got to be able to make free throws, just do simple fundamental things.

So when you have guys that are 12-month guys that put in a lot of time, that area is going to improve. You just got to do a better job there. I got to do a better job there.

Q. You talked about assessing everybody individually. Sandi [Marcius] went from starter to DNP back to a critical role player. David Washington went from a starter at different times to now where he's at. What didn't he do to earn playing time?

MATT PAINTER: I get to this a lot of times when you guys ask questions about that, about guys, and you got to understand they're college students. You know. He got beat out. It's real simple. Rapheal Davis beat out all those guys. He's not a traditional four. Rapheal Davis shows up every single day, he comes early, he stays late, he works on his game, he watches extra film. I'm going to migrate to those guys.

I'm not going to migrate to guys that come in, when practice is at 3 o'clock, right at 3 and it ends at 5:30, they leave right at 5:30. I'm always going to be that way.

I tell my recruits, if you work on your game and you care and you love it, I'm your guy. If you go through the motions or whatever, I'm not your guy.

The guys who didn't play tonight, outside of Travis Carroll and Dru Anthrop, they got to get in the gym. Dru Anthrop, Travis Carroll, they overachieved. They worked their asses off to be here and they care. The other guys are good guys, but you got to show up with a passion and a commitment to what we're doing if you want me to trust you.

I think that's what it comes down to. I don't trust guys that I don't see. You live in that gym, I start to trust you. I think

that's an important thing in college basketball. Period.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

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