Suzy Merchant
Michigan State Spartans

Michigan State - 68, Northwestern - 52

Q. You turned up your three-point shooting and held them to 41 percent (in the first meeting with Maryland). How are you feeling right now about your chances (in the quarterfinals)?
SUZY MERCHANT: Well, I mean, nothing in the past predicts your future, so we know obviously they probably didn't play their best game when they played us, and we were really -- I thought our kids did a great job. Everything was clicking on all cylinders. We're just going to have to continue to move forward. We've had some ups and downs. And Maryland is a heck of a team. They're defending Big Ten Champions that we have to play, so it's not going to be easy, and I'm sure they're looking forward to the battle tomorrow.

Q. You really took advantage of the bench today. How do you plan on using them going forward?
SUZY MERCHANT: Yeah, that's the thing that I think we tried to do as much as we could. I know there's kids on our team that we've played more, but I do think we can go nine, ten deep. And even at the end of last game -- just getting people off their feet for the last couple minutes in a game sometimes helps to move forward when we have to play in back-to-back games. I know some teams aren't that fortunate. They're five, six deep, and those kids log a lot of minutes. I have a couple of kids on my team with long minutes, but I still feel comfortable taking them out, even if it's just for one, two minutes and get them back in.

So the bench I think will help us as we continue forward and hopefully tomorrow. They gave us a lot of good energy today.

Q. The offense seemed to have some struggles at the start of the first and second halves -- well, I should say the first and third quarters. How are you going to be prepared to make a strong opening to, I guess, especially against a great team like Maryland?
SUZY MERCHANT: Well, some of that is -- I mean, sometimes it's a little bit of nerves. I really don't know. But I thought the third quarter was the one that bothered me the most coming out of the gates. They came and really scored the ball well, and we just kind of had some easy looks we didn't really finish on. So I called a time-out because we've had a few games that that's cost us. We only scored six points in a quarter after scoring 27 in one. So we just had to get some consistency and talk about it and say, we need people to step up. This is kind of where it's do or die time. This is where the lulls of this game, you can go for a minute or two, you can't go for a quarter like this. I thought when we came out of that timeout we really started moving the ball forward, and we got some stops. The beginning of the third we were scoring the ball so our (indiscernible) wasn't as effective. So that was another reason we weren't scoring as well.

Q. What did you say in that timeout in the third quarter?
SUZY MERCHANT: Just we've had quarters where we've only scored six points and it's killed us. We can't have that. Like now is the time. We have to put our foot down and get better and we need more leadership and people have to step up. You can't miss lay-ups and then give up a lay-up, miss wide-open shots that we leave. You're not going to get every shot you shoot, but it just seemed like we were a little tentative and everybody was waiting for somebody else to do it. And we wouldn't have survived that game if we had another six-point quarter, because that's what happened to us at their place. It happened three or four times throughout this year. And it's really bizarre because we're scoring 20, 24, 27, then we just have a quarter where we just kind of go away. That timeout was more about that, and I thought the kids came out and did a really good job. And it's hard to design exactly what you want because they're in the zone, right, so if it's a man, it's easy to come out and say, all right, Shay, you're taking this or Taryn, we're getting Taryn a shot or we're going inside or whatever. You can't do that against the zone necessarily. You can kind of see what you're looking for. But it does take a collective effort. So to be able to break that mold a little bit of us kind of having a lull in scoring against the zone I thought was a real positive step forward.
Big Ten Conference
Women's Basketball Championship
Thursday March 7, 2019

Joe McKeown
Northwestern Wildcats


JOE McKEOWN: A hard-fought game. Offensively I think at times we just let our offense affect our defense. In the first half, first quarter, we gave up way more points than we normally do. When we beat Michigan State early in the year, it was because of our defense. I thought in the third quarter we came out, did a great job, came out, took the lead, but they made shots. They made tough shots. They got in transition, and give them credit, too. Really proud of our team. Had a lot of adversity this year with lineups and injuries, and they fought through it all. We’ve got to give them a lot of credit. This is Pallas’ fourth Big Ten Tournament, and regardless, she ended up 5-4 playing in this. I’m not sure anybody in any team over the last four years has played any harder than her in this tournament. Really proud of her. I wish we could have advanced, but again, give Michigan State credit.

Q. (Abbie) Wolf had a great game today and obviously Pallas is a great player, but next year she won’t be here. What has she shown this season, and kind of also today that’s going to help her be a starter next year?

JOE McKEOWN: I appreciate that. Abbie Wolf has had the best second half of the Big Ten that we could even draw up ourselves. Really proud of her. She’s grown up. She has become such a threat on the block. Now she wants the ball. She’s much more aggressive. So really excited for her as a senior. She’s got a great work ethic. So I think this should be -- for us to play, too, hopefully we’ll continue to play this year, for her to get some post season experience going into her senior year. And, you know, she’s a person that because of injury hadn’t played much this year, so now start to practice at a high level, too -- Courtney Shaw, that’s a big, big off-season for her. She reminds me of Pallas as a freshman. But Wolf, she’s had a great finish for us in the Big Ten.

Q. You touched on getting more experience in the post season. What does it mean especially for a young backcourt, Jordan, Lindsey, Veronica especially going forward to get the post season opportunities?

JOE McKEOWN: Yeah, I recruited her, and I say this -- Jordan Hamilton is a great college basketball player. She’s been saddled this last month, so today was rough for her. But to get her back, get some rest, with the way the floor mats are, college basketball, our tournament, it ends this week. We don’t know until the following Monday if we’ll continue to play. We hope we will. That will give Jordan, Veronica, Lindsay Pulliam a chance to really get some downtime. Really we could be a whole different team two weeks from now. But they’ve all -- Veronica Burton, really surprised she didn’t make the all-freshman team. She’s had an incredible year. I was a little disappointed in that. She deserves it. But her, Jordan, Pulliam, Sydney Wood, we’ve got a great foundation right now and great experiences that you learn from this and you move on. You look at all the Big Ten games that came down for us, next year we ended up .500, 9-9, could have easily been 12-6, and hopefully that will -- we’ll be able to do that next year.

Q. You touched on that last year was four wins and this year had .500 in the conference, maybe could have had more. What do you think have been the biggest developments for you guys to take that stuff forward, and playing at home has certainly helped, as well?

JOE McKEOWN: Yeah, well, I’ll tell you, to play well at Welsh-Ryan Arena, we opened it, and the way we played against Duke, you know, that was just great for our program. So I think we saw that all year, playing at home, what a great environment it is. For us to go from four to nine wins in the league is really important. We were close to cracking the top 25 a couple times this year. We’ve got a lot to build on, a lot of positives. Obviously, as you said, we’ll miss Pallas and she’s going to go on and play basketball for a long time. But I think these guys are hungry and they’re young. It gives you a lot to look forward to.