

Penn State Basketball
Micah Shrewsberry Postgame Press Conference
vs. Wagner - December 8, 2021

Micah Shrewsberry | Head Coach

Opening Statement: I'm happy with how our guys played, happy with how our guys prepared. I told coach [Bashir] Mason after the game, I was like "I'll see you guys in March." They didn't play their best tonight but they also were on COVID stoppage and everything else, but that team is going to be good. Alex Morales is a good player, Elijah Ford didn't play very well because he's in foul trouble and everything else, he's a good player, and Zaire Williams for a freshman. Some of the shots they make, some of the things they do, I felt like our guys respected them and we prepared that way. But we also knew how hard this team played, how physical they were and what we needed to do to continue to play well. We've got to keep cleaning different areas up, but I felt like we took steps in the right direction offensively and defensively, so I'm happy with what we did.

Q: Jalanni [White], what has he brought to the table for you guys? Especially having to be that guy that steps in for John [Harrar] when he needs a rest?

A: He never questions what we're doing. [He played] 24 minutes tonight, which is more than he's played in the last few games. But he got an opportunity to play with John tonight. There was a pretty good matchup where he could play with him and I thought they did good things together. They help us rebound, they both can guard their guys around the basket, around the rim, to help stop the ball on our pick-and-roll defense. You know, when he gets to the rim, he competes. He blocks shots, he's long, he's active, he gets offensive rebounds. And I think the more comfortable he gets, the better he gets. As the season keeps going and going, he finds that niche of what he needs to do and then constantly do it each game.

Q: Jalen Pickett hit 500 career assists tonight. What makes Jalen such a unique playmaker?

A: I think he's unique because it's like the old cartoons. The rabbit takes off and the tortoise is still like hanging out by the free throw or by the starting line and that's how Jalen is. He just, kind of, slowly gets his way to the lane and then people come over and help. But he plays at such a pace where he's always under control. He's very rarely not in control. But he's also kind of knows where everybody is, but that's him. Getting good chemistry with John, getting good chemistry with the other guys on the court and them being in the right spots where he knows where they're going to be. He made some of those passes. He gets that kind of dump off every game where he gets in there and he pivots then he shot-fakes and when the guy jumps, [Jalen] jumps and he dumps it down to the big. He threw a pass in the second half late in the game off a pick-and-roll to a guy across on the other side of the court. There's not many people that can do that, that can play that way. He's got good size, he's got long arms, he can pass over the defense. That makes him unique and how he plays. But he's also defending like crazy, too. He's been really good on the defensive end.

Q: When you guys went on that 22-4 run, all 22 of your points came around the rim, from 3-point line or from the free throw line. Is that the best you've seen your offense play this year?

A: We took really long segments of practice Monday and Tuesday, and then a long segment in shootaround today, just strictly focused on our offense, just simplifying what we do, getting everybody on the same page and cutting at a high rate and a high pace and I thought there was a lot of carry-over. You work on things and you hope you carry it over to the game. We spend a lot of time, but then there's also areas where you don't want to take steps back. We didn't spend as much time defensively that we normally do, but yet we were pretty good

defensively too. So that's the challenge of what you do. I felt like how our guys played, how they cut, where we started our offense and where we're getting our first catch, I thought all of that was great. And so we're getting there, we're gonna see a great challenge on Saturday. Michigan State's one of the best defenses in America. So we have to go back and do it again and figure out how to do the same exact things but when you do that, you put time in, and you have success with it. You keep getting more guys to buy in to how we're playing once they see success, so I thought it was the best we've played. We've got to be even better on Saturday.

Q: You said earlier this week, you couldn't expect to beat Wagner by 20 points, but you did come out to beat Wagner by 20 points. How important for confidence is it to get a win by such a high margin?

A: I thought it was going to be like a grind-it-out game. I really did. All week I was concerned about this game. The Ohio State game took a lot out of us. I knew how hard these guys were going to play and what they were gonna do. You know, that's hats off to our guys for how well they played. I thought [Associate Head Coach] Adam Fisher did a great job of preparing them on the defensive end for what they were going to see. And I thought we guarded that great, and then our guys took some things from film in terms of what we watched on how we can attack them, and they did. So, it helps in our confidence. I don't know if this is the exact quote, but 'the most interesting things happen just on the other side of your comfort zone.' Feel like we have to get out of our comfort zone a little bit and try some things, go out on faith and try some things, and I thought they really did that.

Q: Their zone defense seemed to give you some issues in the first half. What's it like as a coach to see that light bulb go off in the second half?

A: This was our first live action in a game against the zone. How they played it was a little extended, so they took away what we were trying to do. So we just had to find the right openings instead of doing exactly how it works in practice, because they guard it a little bit different. You have to tweak just a little bit. So instead of the opening being on the wings, sometimes it's near the elbow. And sometimes it's right in the middle, by the nail. I thought they did a better job of finding where that opening was and we started to get better and better. It's also like a testament of how well we were playing versus man that they went to the zone to try and slow it down. Because I thought we were really moving the ball and getting good shots and good opportunities.