

March 21, 2014



BIG
MEN'S ICE HOCKEY
TOURNAMENT
SAINT PAUL 2014

Wisconsin - 2
Penn State - 1

An Interview with:

**COACH MIKE EAVES
MICHAEL MERSCH
JOEL RUMPEL**

MODERATOR: We have Wisconsin head coach Mike Eaves, student-athletes, forward Michael Mersch and goalie Joel Rumpel. We will start with the opening statement from the head coach, and then we'll go to questions for the student-athletes and then back to questions for head coach. Coach Eaves, an opening statement.

COACH EAVES: First off, I would like to congratulate Penn State in the effort they gave this Big Ten Tournament. They played a monster game last night, had to get right back in the saddle. And we were in their shoes last year, and we know how difficult it is to come in and play all this hockey and try to win three games in three nights. And they represented themselves very well. They can have no regrets leaving the arena tonight.

As for our group, it took the first period before we got our feet underneath us. Penn State was playing at a higher level, quicker pace. They were making decisions with the puck before they got it. And we started to pick it up a little bit in the second period. I thought our power play created nice chances, penalty killing was good. Young goaltender did what he needed to do, and Big Mike put his big body in front of the net, do what he does well, combination of those things helped us tonight.

MODERATOR: Questions for student-athletes.

Q. How difficult is it to beat a team five times in one season, especially a team that plays as physically and tenaciously as a team does?

MICHAEL MERSCH: Any team in our league and around college hockey, it's tough to beat five games in a row. They put in a good effort every single time, what was it, four out of five of them were one-goal games. They're a good team and had a good effort tonight. But I'm glad we came out on top.

Q. Michael, Coach always talked about responding after a goal. And you guys were able to come back and I think it was like 35 seconds after you were able to get that goal. Then your second goal was right at the end of the period. How big were those two goals in terms of the momentum of the contest?

MICHAEL MERSCH: Yeah, they were huge. After we get scored on, we've been taught line on break for the draw and let them know that we're coming for them.

So to get a goal on the shift after is huge. Jefferson [Dahl] made a good pass to me and I was able to drive the net and put it in.

Q. You guys won three games last year here at the Xcel. This time around you don't have to win to get in the NCAA tournament. How does that change your focus?

MICHAEL MERSCH: Well, we were working hard to get that first round bye, as coach said, it's tough to come back, win three games in a row, especially in a tournament like this, when you have great teams in it.

And we were able to do that, get that first round bye and we had fresh legs. But now we're focused on their next game tomorrow. So we're going to have to recover for that.

JOEL RUMPEL: Yeah, I mean, it doesn't change too much. We're still playing like it could be our last game. We won the last WCHA. It's cool how it was. And we want to win the first Big Ten Tournament. So not much has changed. We're still playing like if we lose we're dead. So that's how I see it, anyway.

Q. Michael, did you get any dose of

motivation, perhaps, from the notion that you hadn't really had a great deal of success in the playoffs coming into this weekend, want to maybe make a statement about?

MICHAEL MERSCH: Yeah, it's something that's always been in the back of my head. You want to contribute to your team, especially in crunch time at the end of the season, and I know we talked about it earlier this week. So it was nice to contribute. Like I said, though, guys step up, play roles in the playoffs here.

So everybody contributed blocking shots in the penalty kill and making passes on the power play and chipping the pucks out. And a lot of people step up in different ways, not just goal scoring, but it was nice to contribute.

Q. The whole line seemed energized tonight. I think Morgan [Zulnick] may have had one of the better games I've seen him play in a long time. Did you have -- could you sense you guys were clicking pretty well?

MICHAEL MERSCH: Yeah, we've been in a little bit of a slump together. And we've been positive. So we've been positive with each other just saying we're going to get it, it's going to come, and lucky enough we worked hard tonight and were able to connect the dots and put the puck in the net.

Q. Michael, did you get any sense there was any leftover fatigue in that game?

MICHAEL MERSCH: As Coach said, it's always tough to come around play a game especially -- think about it, they played, was it two overtimes I think it was. So I think it was like three and a half periods, four and a half periods. So that's really tough.

And it's hard for a team to come out, legs maybe will be there in the first period or two. But if you keep on them, keep chipping pucks in, chasing, which we did tonight, we made their "D" turn and it paid off towards the end.

MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. Not to take away from the team effort, but looking at some of the guys, did you guys expect to make plays on the first line, getting some goals, how did you see that in the playoff setting, especially looking at the first line, how valuable getting the pucks in the defensive zone?

COACH EAVES: The [Mark] Zengerle line has been doing a lot of the goal scoring in the

regular season. We've been looking for contributions, secondary contributions from [Jefferson] Dahl's line. And they got a little bit of start at Michigan State and tonight they carried on and got a big first goal for us that unit and, as was mentioned, they did a lot of good things tonight.

So it's nice to see that. I know that there was questions about Michael's [Mersch] production at playoff time. And offense is always a thing that's talked about at playoff time whether a person is clutch or that type of thing. Offense is a real finicky type of thing. It comes and goes.

It's a creative thing. But Michael [Mersch], through all of this, he keeps staying on the ice after, doing extra work trying to get back that feeling. Makes the down period, the creativity, goal scoring minimum, because he keeps doing the things he needs to do to keep himself going. He came through tonight in a big way. I know he feels good about that, because it helped the team win.

Q. Can you talk about what you have seen from Penn State this season and some of the tight games they've been in lately?

COACH EAVES: The biggest thing about Penn State, they give themselves a chance to win because they play so hard. That's their foundation. They have a big team. And they're effective on a small sheet of ice.

And they play well together. They have a very good goaltender that allows them to make some mistakes and he covers for them. They keep working hard. And every one of their lines contributes. Take a look at the numbers of their line, they're pretty close. Every line that comes over the board is going to chip in some form or fashion. But the foundation of why they are here is the fact they play hard.

Q. Mike, as cyclical as you see offense is, how did it make you feel to see Michael [Mersch] respond the way he did tonight?

COACH EAVES: It was a matter of time. You and I have talked about it in great length, because of his work ethic, this flow and ebb that offense has, he works through it, shortened the time he was down in the valley and he's back on top.

Michael [Mersch] knows that one of his responsibilities on our team is to be on the score sheet. He takes great pride on that. It's nice for

him. That gives him confidence, and he gets that confidence, maybe he can stay up there for a while.

Q. Your team started a little bit off in the first period. Can you speak to why they were so slow?

COACH EAVES: You see it a lot when you play -- we hadn't played in a week. They played last night. So they're in game mode right away. The quickness of their decisions, the ability of them to move the puck right away.

We were a step behind. So that's why we looked off. We talked about it as a group. It's one thing to talk about. It's another thing to go out keep your mindset on course and not get thrown off. And it was just a matter of time we felt we told them it's going to come and it did come for us.

Q. Your power play has also had kind of a slow progression. Are you happy with the pace it's picked up and it's been effective towards the later half of the season and tonight again?

COACH EAVES: It was a little bit ago that we had a chat as a group. Our numbers weren't good. At different times we had different people out. We weren't congruent in the people that were on the power play together.

After we got everybody back, we said we don't need to look at percentages, we need to be a group that is effective and can score goals that have meaning in games.

It's done that for about the last four or five weeks.

Q. Piggybacking off that start question. It's been a topic all season long. When they get that goal, Michael comes back, how big is that for you guys to come right back and score?

COACH EAVES: It's a mindset that this group has that it's about responding, and that's the verbiage that's on the bench by our team. Let's respond, let's respond. And to be able to come back and do that, we're right back on top then. We have the momentum.

So they pushed and we pushed back, and get the momentum on our side.

MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, Coach.

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