

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Idaho vs Houston

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA

Paycom Center

**Houston Cougars**

**Coach Kelvin Sampson**

**Chris Cenac, Jr.**

**Kingston Flemings**

Media Conference



Houston 78, Idaho 47

THE MODERATOR: We are joined now by Houston student-athletes Kingston Flemings and Chris Cenac Jr. and head Coach Kelvin Sampson. We'll start with an opening statement from Coach Sampson and then open it up for questions.

KELVIN SAMPSON: First of all, congratulations to Idaho, their staff, their players. Winning the Big Sky tournament they won it, winning four games in five days is a tremendous accomplishment, something that they should be really proud of.

It's hard to make this tournament. It's really hard. There are so many good teams that don't get a chance to play in this. Coach Pribble's kids were well-coached. They had a good plan. They fought. They played really hard, and they scrapped.

Congratulations to those guys. I wish them nothing but the best going forward. As far as our kids, you know, holding a team to 24 points in a half and then following up and holding them to 23 points is difficult to do. I think the key to that is rebounding, defensive rebounding.

You know, we had a plan coming in with the way they were in their pick-and-roll coverage. We felt like Kingston could get downhill and get to his pull-up, because their big played back. We call that drop coverage. Sometimes the center field drop, which means they're back a little further, which kind of plays right into Kingston's hands with his pull-up and Milos with his floater.

Chris's motor tonight was outstanding, getting 18 rebounds, 12 the first half, 6 the second, which keeps them off the offensive boards. You know, holding them to 28%, and they've been a good three-point shooting team. They made some tough ones tonight. Emanuel fouled the little point guard there twice. That wasn't very smart, but all in all, just a good first game.

You put it under your belt and move on down the road. Tough one on Saturday.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. For Chris and Kingston, what were maybe your emotions coming into the game, and after that slow start as a team, when did you kind of feel like you got comfortable there in the first half?**

KINGSTON FLEMINGS: Yeah, I mean, starting the game, they're a good team, obviously making it to the tournament. Won the tip. I had a bad turnover. Should have shot the shot. Ended up fumbling the ball. I think, you know, when we really started getting our is when we started playing defense. That's what always happened. Defense and rebounding, and then we can start scoring on the offensive end. Offense is going to follow the defense. I think once we started getting stops and kills, that's really when our offense started exploding in the first half.

CHRIS CENAC JR.: Yeah, I think he couldn't have said it better. After that four-minute timeout and we made subs, we fought good on the defensive end, and that's when the whole game changed.

**Q. This one is for Kingston. You were the game high scorer in your first March Madness game. Can you talk a little bit about your approach to leadership, especially in uncharted territories like March Madness?**

KINGSTON FLEMINGS: Yeah, I mean, Milos talks to me a lot, like talks to me a lot, you know, just on the court. I see certain things, and just try to talk to the team about it. He says always voice my opinion, because anything I say can help the team.

So just trying to become more of a leader on just working



on it in practice. I remember Coach talking to me about that, being more of a leader and just talking, because I see certain things. So just trying to be more of a leader like that, following after Milos, following after (indiscernible). Those are two great guys to follow. Ramon, too, Ramon is one of our best leaders. So following after those guys makes it easy. You have a blueprint to follow, so just following after them and just trying to get better day by day.

**Q. Chris, for you, out of the 39 defensive rebounds you guys had tonight, you had 17 of them. How much of that just keeps you confident in your ability to continue being a force defensively?**

CHRIS CENAC JR.: Yeah, I mean, just playing to my strengths. I knew that they don't really crash the offensive boards like that, so you know there were going to be opportunities. Just staying confident and going every time.

**Q. For both of you guys, seeing that this is your first game in March Madness and you had pretty efficient games, how motivating and encouraging is it for you as you guys continue to make a push for this tournament?**

CHRIS CENAC JR.: Very motivated, and just being here with all my teammates and all my brothers, you know, I don't think I would be able to do what I do without them. They give me a lot of confidence. I have a lot of fun doing it with them, so...

KINGSTON FLEMINGS: Yeah, I think coming to the game, you always dream about playing in March Madness, so I think just coming in here, we watch a lot of film. Credit to all the coaches that we have, I mean, just watching the film, knowing exactly what's going to work, and they talk to us about it, me getting to my pull-up, Milos getting to his floater, and it was there all game.

I worked on that a lot, so just continuing to do all the things I worked on. I mean, it's 40 minutes on a hardwood floor. It's always just basketball at the end of the day, so just trying to do what I can and just follow after what coaches say and just hit my shots.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen. Questions for Coach.

**Q. Kelvin, speaking of freshmen, during one of the time-outs the interviews you did, you mentioned before the game they were kind of a little freshmen-ny in terms of nerves. How much of a calming influence is having Emanuel there to be able to maybe work with those guys and talk to them?**

KELVIN SAMPSON: I remember he was a freshman. This is his fifth NCAA Tournament, fourth playing in it. This is Milos' second with us, Joe Joe's third. So we have a lot of guys that's played in multiple -- I think this is our -- how many is this in a row for us? Eighth? So it's our eighth in a row.

I think it's the first time we've had freshmen, though, Jarace Walker. Jarace was the only other freshman we had.

Kingston and Chris started day one. Kingston I don't think has missed a practice all year or a workout or a lift or anything, shooting session. He never misses. He's never late. His character is elite.

Chris's character is elite, as is all our kids. That's always been our secret sauce. That's why we've had four kids in our top nine transfer over the last 11 years. Everybody is trying to stack rosters. We always felt like we knew who was coming back, and that's an advantage.

Last year's team had four starters back from the year before. LJ Cryer, J'Wan Roberts, Emanuel Sharp, and JoJo Tugler. All four of those guys were back from the year before. This year we had three starters back, and we plugged in Kingston and Chris.

Then we have most of the bench -- well, all the bench guys from last year came back. Mercy, Chase, Ramon, Ced, Jacob, all those guys came back. So that's an advantage, especially in this era of portal, NIL stuff.

We're kind of old-school in how we approach things. Building relationships is important. I think the two strengths of our program, I would say, is our character of our kids and our staff.

We have a great staff. Kellen, Hollis, KC, all those guys, they do an awesome job with our team. They don't get enough credit. Our staff is awesome.

**Q. I was talking to Karen before the game, and she was talking about how she still gets butterflies when NCAA Tournament time rolls around, even though this is No. 21 for you guys. She said she sensed it out of you. Do you still get that same sort of feeling? What's it like to have had her along for this ride? I know you've talked about having your kids and your grandkids, but what about Karen being there?**

KELVIN SAMPSON: Well, Karen and I, we've been married 46 years, but we started dating when we were 16, so she was my high school sweetheart, and we've been together since 1972. So we were in North Carolina; East Lansing, Michigan; Butte, Montana, which is seven miles

away from Idaho's campus, by the way.

Back in the day drinking age in State of Washington was 21. Idaho was 18. So you knew where our kids went on their official visits. You guys shouldn't go there with your thoughts. I'm just saying.

But then both Kellen and Lauren were born in Butte, same hospital, same doctor. Dr. St. John, St. James Hospital, and then they were raised in the Palouse.

We left Pullman when Kellen was a fourth grader and Lauren was a seventh grader. So they went off and chased their fame and fortune, but the common denominator has been Karen.

She graduated college when she was 20. She could have done anything she wanted to do. She worked and learned to play the piano and played the guitar so she could teach her first graders to read better. She's one of those.

I had a great mother and father, but Karen has always been the constant. She's been the common sense one, calmed me down when I needed to be calmed down, gave me encouragement when I've needed a little encouragement over the years, but it's been a good ride.

We're getting toward the end here. You know, you get to be 70, you realize it's a young man's game.

You know, for her and me, it's just been fun. It's been fun. We've brought so many different teams to the tournament at different schools. I think my excitement comes from -- that's why I wanted to bring these freshmen here. I wanted them to experience this. I like the fact that Kingston thought it was pretty cool his name is up there. The kid is going to be a top-10 draft pick, and he's so naive. I mean, he really is naive, but that's part of what makes Kingston special.

He has no ego. Chris has no ego. None of our guys have egos. I knocked the ego out of them early. Not literally, but that's always been a strength of our program is we play for each other, and our program is more important than any individual, and that includes me.

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