

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Iowa vs Clemson

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Tampa, Florida, USA

Benchmark International Arena

Clemson Tigers

Coach Brad Brownell

RJ Godfrey

Dillon Hunter

Media Conference



fun and an electric game tomorrow.

Q. Coach, Bennett's Stirtz 20 points a game scored. What makes him a difficult player to guard against and game plan against?

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, I think he changes speeds exceptionally well. Terrific talent, really good athlete, great quickness, ball skills, size at the point guard position. Can shoot over you, competitive spirit, will to win. You see all of it when you watch him play. He's really an outstanding player.

Q. Does it carry over year to year to year? These appearances in the tournament as far as you know what happened last year, you flushed that, approach everything with a new focus? How do you deal with it year to year to year?

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, I think it's different. Just like every season is different, your team is different. Your opponent is different. So there's a different set of issues you're trying to deal with. Certainly the experience of having some guys that have played in this tournament is important, can be helpful. But each year I think is different and presents its own unique challenge.

Q. Ace started well the last two, really shooting the ball well. What have you seen from him in this last stretch?

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, I've seen it for a good bit this season. I think just his confidence has grown through the year. He's a really competitive young man. He really works at it. So I think it's just the benefit of a lot of hard work. I think his confidence has grown as he's played better.

Then just maybe a little bit also just getting used to being an aggressive player, an assertive player for us. That probably started earlier this year, but I just think he's more comfortable in that role right now.

Q. Obviously no Carter, but the next step is with RJ Godfrey around the rim, you have a little bit of an advantage when it comes to rebounding. How crucial will his presence be around the rim against Iowa?

Q. RJ, you talked at length about what it means being back at Clemson now this year. Can you talk a little bit about your experience going into March Madness and what it feels like to be a Tiger again going into the tournament?

RJ GODFREY: Yeah, obviously it was a crazy season, and I enjoyed every second of it, from November to now. It's just so good to be back, and I'm just so glad that the Clemson family embraced me with love and comfort.

They've been a big reason why I and this team has played so hard. Always going to March, it's the goal. It's like one of the goals of your team. We do it for the people that support us. They've been such a help. They've been such an uplift for us this season, especially at home.

Being back in Tiger Town and playing for not only just my teammates, but for the people, has been awesome.

Q. What kind of jumps out when you've been studying Iowa so far?

DILLON HUNTER: They're a well-coached team. They run a lot of sets through their point guard, so we understand what type of team they are. Well-rounded team kind of like us, play in the Big Ten. They play at a slower pace, so we're just scouting them and seeing different things, seeing how we'll match up with them.

RJ GODFREY: Yeah, obviously they have one of the most electric guards in the country in Stirtz and he can really score it. They're very disciplined on both ends, and they guard well, and they get to the paint well. It's going to be



BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, obviously disappointed that Carter won't be with us. You hate that for anybody, especially a guy that's come this far this season, and I think was really starting to play well and feel comfortable. It's just more responsibility for our big guys, certainly RJ Godfrey, who's having a terrific year for us and does a really good job on both ends. But Nick Davidson, I think, is a really important piece.

The heartbeat of our team has kind of been those three bigs, and now we're a man down. It's going to be next man up. Chase Thompson will get a few more reps. Trent Steinour is healthy again and might even get some opportunity, you never know. We'll be challenged in this tournament with that for sure.

Q. Your assistant Billy Donlon took the Eastern Michigan job. How proud are you of him and was it his decision to stay with the team during March Madness?

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, a little bit of both. Obviously he's really close with a lot of our players, and I'm so happy for him. It's very well deserving. He's going to do a great job at Eastern Michigan. But he wants to see this through. He wants to be with these guys and our team and see how far we can go.

So yeah, it was a little bit of a mutual decision that we talked about over the last 72 hours or so.

Q. How much do you enjoy playing Big Ten teams that like to rough it up in there?

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, a lot of respect for that league growing up, watching that kind of basketball. And certainly Ben, what he's done with Iowa this year, he's done an outstanding job. It's not easy to come into a new situation and to take them to an NCAA Tournament his first year. He brought a couple guys with him from Drake, so there's some things that made the transition a little bit easier. They've just done a really good job.

I watch a lot of Big Ten. As most people know, I watch a lot of basketball. I'm just kind of a basketball junkie that way. I've seen them play a couple times before I started studying them, and. When you do start to study them, you become even more impressed with the kind of coach that Ben is and the way he's getting the most out of his group.

I think he's done an unbelievable job, and look forward to a big challenge tomorrow.

Q. I wanted to ask about Bennett Stirtz. I remember listening to your press conference following Selection

Sunday that you didn't know too much about Iowa but you knew about Bennett Stirtz. I'm curious now that you've scouted him, what have you seen from his ability to lead Iowa this year?

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, he's a remarkable player, and man, it's great with all that's going on. There are certainly some negatives with the transfer portal and things that are going on in college basketball, but he's a great story of a guy playing Division II and following his coach and then playing extremely well at Drake. And now he comes to the Big Ten and the guy is on draft boards and could be a lottery pick.

That's a great story out of all this. He's very talented. Again, great size. For guys to do what he's done, you have to have a tremendous competitive spirit about you. He's got high-level will to win, high skill level, can create any shot for himself or his teammates, and I think he plays the game with unbelievable poise. He knows when to go fast, when to go slow, and I think sometimes that's the key to excellent guard play.

Very few guys have that natural instinct and gift. He certainly has that when you watch them play.

Q. The last March Madness with RJ Godfrey and Dillon Hunter, how have you seen them embrace this final round -- how proud are you of those guys --

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, I'm really proud of RJ and Dillon both, because I've talked about how those guys were the leaders of our team. Not many people expected much out of our team. We lost a lot off of last year's group. A lot of points, a lot of rebounds, assists, all of it, experience.

And those two guys, when we just got together in June and talked about it, and I just told them I thought we could still have a really good team. That there was going to be a lot on their plate to help me mesh this new group of guys that we were bringing in, was a bigger group than normal. And they've done an incredible job of being leaders, mentors, and then obviously good players on a team that's had a lot of success this year.

So I'm really proud of them, and I know that their hearts are deep into this tournament and game, and they're proud of what they've accomplished and want more.

Q. I spoke with you at the Jimmy V Classic in New York back in December, and there was a lot mentioned about finding the identity of this team. Could you talk a little bit about the process. And if you were asked today, what is the identity of Clemson men's basketball, what would you say?

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

BRAD BROWNELL: Yeah, it's our depth. We adopted a phrase, everybody all the time, and we need everybody playing well all the time. We need everybody's focus, their attention to detail, their competitive spirit in practice every day, in preparation, certainly in our games.

But we thought that the strength of our team was our depth, and we thought that this summer when we were competing against one another.

We talked openly that we probably wouldn't have an all-conference player, but we could still have a really good team. That takes some humility from your players, guys who are willing to sacrifice.

Certainly we have a group that has done that. And anytime you get the opportunity to coach a terrific group of young men that are willing to do those things, you have a great chance to have some success, and we have this year.

Q. Any other injury concerns or illness concerns?

BRAD BROWNELL: No. Carter is enough. We're banged up in a lot of positions, like a lot of teams at this point. There's just a lot of guys that are hurting in little areas. But we should be full go.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.