

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Tennessee State vs Iowa State

Thursday, March 19, 2026

St. Louis, Missouri, USA

Enterprise Center

## Iowa State Cyclones

## TJ Otzelberger

## Milan Momcilovic

## Tamin Lipsey

## Joshua Jefferson

Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: Iowa State University Cyclones are with us. They are the No. 2 seed in the Midwest region. They represent the Big 12 Conference. They will play No. 15 seeded Tennessee State University tomorrow 20 minutes after the conclusion of Game 1.

The head coach is T.J. Otzelberger. On the dais we have Joshua Jefferson, Tamin Lipsey and Milan Momcilovic. We will start with questions from any of the people on the dais.

**Q. Coach was talking yesterday about you guys wanting to play faster as you continue to unlock the offense. In Kansas City you pushed it after defensive rebounds, out in transition, attacking the rim. How much of an emphasis was it after you after the loss in Tucson?**

JOSHUA JEFFERSON: It was huge. When we get in transition, it will give our offense a better chance to be effective and get more quality shots, especially for our bigs being at the rim, Milan transition and Tamin getting down hill. It's going to benefit all of us.

Just pushing the ball and playing fast is going to help.

**Q. Joshua talked about transitions. Milan, how do you find the right space to get off the shots and make sure you are open for a high-percentage look?**

MILAN MOMCILOVIC: Sometimes it is reading the break. If we are pushing it fast, then maybe running to the

corners, or if it is a slower break, trail behind. These guys will flip it back to me.

So kind of just reading how fast, how slow we are going, where the defense is at. Because those are some of the easier 3s that I can get that are wide open.

**Q. JR Blount has been hired at the University of San Diego as their head coach. I wonder if each of you could tell me what kind of a coach he is? Good cop/bad cop, stickler for the rules? And what kind of head coach will he be?**

JOSHUA JEFFERSON: I think JR is going to be an amazing coach in San Diego. I have played there, so I understand the work he is going to have to do. I think he's the right man for the job with the amount of energy and the plan he is going to set forth. I think he is going to succeed really well.

TAMIN LIPSEY: Obviously I think he is going to succeed as well. I have been with him for four years. My whole college career, he has been the one I have been watching film with, developing my game, all of that. He has gotten me to where I am as a player. That goes to show his development and what he can do on the court.

As a coach, as a head coach I know he is going to be great. I know he is going to be very enthusiastic. He is going to be enthusiastic on both sides of the ball. I know for us he was huge on defense. That's where his strengths are, and I feel like he will probably transition that great to San Diego.

MILAN MOMCILOVIC: Yeah, I think he recruited me when I was in high school. First and foremost, he will be an elite recruiter. He will bring the right guys into that program. I think he will build it from the bottom up. He is a great competitor, like these guys said.

He's a winner a great man with a great family. I got nothing but the most confidence that San Diego will be a great program moving forward.

**Q. Joshua, to follow up on something Coach said yesterday. He talked about how physical you were in Kansas City and how screening has become an**



**influence in your game offensively since the loss in Tucson. How has that changed or evolved for you the last few weeks?**

JOSHUA JEFFERSON: Going back and watching the film, I understand screening will get me open up more but also my teammates. When I am screening, as well as the five men I think that's been a big emphasis from the front court guys.

Continue to screen and play hard that way. So it is going to give us more easy buckets.

**Q. Follow-up with Tamin. Coach talked as well about you guys are going to have difficult conversations or look at things offensively after the loss to Arizona in Tucson. What were those moments like for you guys evaluating film, seeing your shortcomings, seeing areas where you could improve?**

TAMIN LIPSEY: I think that Arizona game and a few weeks prior we were trying to change up some things in our offense, but after the Arizona game in Tucson we decided to just go back to what we know best, and that's playing with pace, movement, more freely.

So, obviously, had to watch film and get back to what we were playing like in the summer and early in the season. But I feel like it was just that conversation of, what do we like? What is comfortable with us players?

We had a little player meeting with Crawford and Schmidty and talked about what we like to run and things like that on the offensive side. That's good to get on the same page. I feel like that's how we were able to make a big jump in the Big 12 Tournament.

THE MODERATOR: We are going to ask TJ to make an opening statement for his team about being in the great state of St. Louis.

T.J. OTZELBERGER: It is an absolute honor to be in St. Louis in this tournament. Nothing like the NCAA Tournament and the opportunity for the culmination of all of your habits and the things you do every day from the start of the summer in June, through a challenging season, and to be at this point with our team and have this opportunity is something that is really special.

So I am proud of the young men in our locker room. I am proud of how they represent our university, how they carry themselves, how they treat people. I think all of those things are extremely important to us. We value those things and we believe when you do those things well the outcomes of the game takes care of itself.

So excited for this opportunity. Tremendous respect for Tennessee State and what they have been able to accomplish this year. We are going to aim we know what we need to do to be our best tomorrow and that's what we will aim to do.

**Q. Hey, T.J., I wanted to ask you about J.R., and what kind of coach he is, if you can just sort of describe him to people who don't know him. And obviously there's a lot of good coaches out there, but what sort of qualities does he have that maybe gives him a chance at a place that hasn't had a lot of success?**

T.J. OTZELBERGER: I would say even before we get to the basketball, he is a tremendous husband, father, leader, man of character. I think those things set the tone for what you are able to do as a coach.

When it comes down to the basketball piece, he is an elite teacher of the game. He is somebody that is very hard-working, very thoughtful, very intentional, very bright, and I don't even say young coaching mind. I think he has proven in the Big 12 to go against some of the best coaches in America and do a great job.

The San Diego program is in great hands. I couldn't have more thankfulness and gratitude to his service to Iowa State over the past five years, and they should be excited about the future of the program. He is a bright, talented elite teacher, player development coach, someone that is a great game tactician and a winner through and through. The basketball program is in great hands.

**Q. Hey T.J., how much responsibility does Tamin put on himself to leave Iowa State in a better place than when he arrived?**

T.J. OTZELBERGER: I think Tamin's actions on a daily basis showed how important it is for him. It started his freshman year and gone on for four seasons.

I don't look as much as pressure as much as self-accountability, personal pride, caring about people, wanting to continue to make this program and elevate this program to levels higher than when they were when he came in. It is how you do anything, it's how you do everything.

There is nobody "how you do everything is how you do everything" more than Tamin Lipsey. When you are Scholar Athlete of the Year in the Big 12 Conference, when you have proven what he has done in the body of work over four years when you are three-year all defensive player, when you have kept your team in the top of the

standings time in and time out, countless hustle plays, winning plays, extra-effort plays, like there's no question about it. Tamin has not only elevated our program wherever this journey takes us, the amount of gratitude and thankfulness we have to him for what he has done, he wears that pride on his sleeve every single day.

There couldn't be a player out there that cares more about his team winning, about his community, about his campus, about his university, and about this basketball program. We are just so fortunate to have him as our leader.

**Q. How is the mindset been through the course of the season? How do you enforce it and coach it?**

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Our mindset is be at the very best when the best is needed. You do that by daily habits and focus on things. It is not something you talk about. It is something you live out. Your actions have to speak louder than words.

For our guys what we have seen, even as we have had great triumphs through the course of the season, you have also had challenges. You want both of those experiences. Character is built more on adversity than success, and how you get yourself up after you get knocked down. Our guys have done a remarkable job of that. We have talked about how all of those experiences help elevate and build your confidence as you head into March.

We just came off three games in three day in the best league in the country in our conference tournament. We played great for three games. Yet our best is in front of us.

The key is to focus on the next thing. The next thing is the opportunity in front of us, whether it is a practice, film session, team-building opportunity. You continue to focus on those things and the results will take care of themselves.

Our guys have had great mental focus. We have tremendous leadership. We have had guys who have played in this event before, guys who have done it with us, and guys who have tremendous pride in our program. Now it is about putting it all together.

**Q. Hey Coach. The players talked about there being a conversation says between them and Coach Crawford around the loss at Arizona about trying to tinker with things offensively. They talked about wanting to go back to some of the things that led to you guys having success early in the year. As you evaluate that time, why was it important for you guys to go back to what was leading to your success and not be so complicated, if that is what you decided to do**

**offensively?**

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Most of all when you play in the best league in America and play against really great defenses and even how the schedule lines up is a factor, you're going to have some challenges. You are going to have time where you need to find better solutions. That's not a unique situation for us. That's for all of the teams. As good of a year Arizona as had or Houston had or some others you take a loss, take a couple in a row, you might take three in a row and you have to figure out how to make necessary changes and come up with better solutions.

I think for us we believe a lot more in simplicity, and players uniting, connecting, making plays for one another. I think what can happen in the Big 12 is teams are so good on the offensive glass, at times it can prevent you from playing with as much pace and getting out and running. Getting a rebound sometimes is such a challenge that you need a deep breath after you get that rebound to gather yourself.

What we have really tried to lean into is saying that regardless of outcome of the last possession -- obviously, if we get a live ball steal, fly it up and score it. If we are able to get a defensive rebound, let's play with a little more flow and pace. Even if our opponent was to score or make a free throw, let's get that thing out and play with momentum.

That is something that has been helpful for our guys, so we are not playing as many possessions against a set defense with our opponent.

**Q. One thing you talked about is wanting to have an elite offense to accompany elite defense. Is that something you have decided to lean into more and continuing to grow and improve on the offensive end over your tenure?**

T.J. OTZELBERGER: I feel like obviously that's what the numbers support. If you were to look at KenPom one of those things. Ultimately we are trying to put a formula together every day that is about work habits, about consistency. More than anything if you are the team that desires to win more and you earn it every day more, you put yourself in great position. Oftentimes that comes down to defensive effort, comes down to how connected you are, how important winning is, making those extra effort plays.

What we have also tried to do is take the same extra effort plays and bring them out on the offensive end. Whether that means an elite screen, whether it means tremendous ball movement, whether it means the most elite effort possible to the offensive glass. So many times when people look at offensive numbers, they just think it is

half-court offense. The best offensive teams score in transition, they score on second chance every bit as much they produce on the half court.

All of those areas are important. We are very intentional with all of the details of how we can continue to better and move our program forward. I would say more than anything it is the tremendous talents of the young men in our program. What guys are doing and the pride they take for playing one another is probably more important than schematic part of the offense. When they care about each other and share the ball and celebrate each other's successes, then you can do some special things.

We have seen our team playing with that type of mindset and mentality.

**Q. T.J. you talked a lot about finding solutions. How does that frame or that mindset of approaching problems or issues help you guys solve them and communicate it to your players?**

T.J. OTZELBERGER: We have a tremendous belief that everything that comes at you is an opportunity as opposed adversity. If you look at things from a perspective of everything is an opportunity to learn and grow and be better, I think you approach it, everything has a solution and you just have to continue to find better solutions.

I think often people can get bogged down or plagued with challenges, adversity in thinking there's no way out of this. We can't solve this, can't fix this. We are fortunate because of the character of the young men in our program anything that comes our way we have the ability to solve it. It is my responsibility to everybody in our locker room and everybody in our program to be the best problem solver that I can be and set the tone that way for everybody else.

Like I said, I think they are all opportunities. They are opportunities to show your character, your greatness, your toughness. We want to take every one of those opportunities and make sure we are our absolute best.

**Q. Five-year anniversary of being the coach of Iowa State. How are you happy with the first five years and going into the Tournament, what are you looking for?**

T.J. OTZELBERGER: First of all thanks to Mr. Pollard back there for the five-year anniversary. He and his wife Ellen are here. They have other anniversaries they are celebrating because of St. Louis, too.

I would say, look, I love Iowa State. I love this program. Every day you have to pinch yourself when you get to wake up and truly live your dream every single day. How

lucky we really are. How lucky my family is and what an honor it is for us. We don't take that for granted one day. We try to treat every day to maximize what we are able to do and make sure our actions speak louder than our words.

We have a lot of pride in this program continues to do really well and the consistency of it means a whole lot to us. We are going to continue to have the work habits that reflect that day in and day out.

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