

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Kentucky vs Iowa State

Saturday, March 21, 2026

St. Louis, Missouri, USA

Enterprise Center

Iowa State Cyclones

Jamarion Batemon

Blake Buchanan

Dominykas Pleta

Media Conference



preparation we put in, we have a deep bench. So players are ready to step up when their number is called.

BLAKE BUCHANAN: Yeah. I would say it's kind of that next-person-up mentality. I think the fact that he did get injured early yesterday allowed some guys that haven't played as much and to expand on their role a little bit yesterday. I think that was kind of good in that way. So kind of allowed for some guys to get comfortable. Obviously we're going to hope that he can be out there with us. He's an All American. He's a big part of our team and why we're here in this position.

But I think T.J. kind of just told us to honor him in everything that we do if he's not out there, do the things that J-Jeff does on the floor. So we're going to go out there, play hard if he's not out there with us and kind of do the things that he does, and each kind of take some of his slack and pick it up for him.

Q. We hear this term imposing your will on your opponent a lot. Could you define that? What does imposing your will on Kentucky look like?

BLAKE BUCHANAN: Yeah. Just kind of just dictating from the start. I think it's just being physical, not allowing the catches where we don't want them to catch the ball. Just box out, just kind of everything we do, just be physical and set the tone, don't be on our heels. Just kind of set the tone early is kind of what that kind of means.

JAMARION BATEMON: Yeah. I would say just being the more physical team and being the more competitive team, just being the team that wants to win more, and it'll show on the court.

Q. Blake, you kind of led into this about when J-Jeff went down early, and then you guys had all game to kind of play without him. Tamin didn't play a lot for him either. It was interesting that some of the lineups and stuff we hadn't seen really this year. Can you guys walk me through, how can you use that going forward, as well, because it almost looked like next year's team, too. A lot of the young guys were out there.

DOMINYKAS PLETA: Yeah. We have a deep team. So

Q. Your early impressions of Kentucky as you guys have looked at the film.

BLAKE BUCHANAN: I mean, obviously, we know they're a good team. They play in the SEC. That's a physical conference. We watched a little bit of film on them this morning. We'll keep watching throughout the day. But we know what they do. We kind of know what they want to go to. So it should be a good game. We're excited to play them.

JAMARION BATEMON: We kind of know they like to play fast. Emphasis on getting back and setting our defense. Like he said, we know they're a good team. So we have to bring our A game and get the job done.

DOMINYKAS PLETA: They try to play physical, but at the end of the day it's about us, what we do. Gotta get back on defense, set our defense, rebound and play physical.

Q. With Joshua's situation, you don't know if he's going to be out there or not, how does that impact the team at all? Does it impact your preparation specifically for the bigs, I guess, with you guys are going to have to increase your role a little bit.

DOMINYKAS PLETA: Yeah, I mean, he's one of our key guys, so everybody has to step up, play harder, play more, maybe. Yeah, we already did a good job two days ago. Guys stepped up.

JAMARION BATEMON: I would say it definitely affects us. What he does is special. Not a lot of people can do what he do. So it definitely affects. But I feel like the



everybody can play basketball. Dom Nelson stepped up. So it shows even with a guy out we can still compete on a high level. So, yeah, we're not scared.

JAMARION BATEMON: Yeah. I'd say just all the hours of practice. We mix up teams in practice. And so we have all those kind of different combinations, and everybody play together at once before. So I feel like we're all used to each other, and whatever lineup we have to put out there because of foul trouble or injuries, I feel like we can compete with anybody.

BLAKE BUCHANAN: Yeah. I mean kind of going off what he just said, our coaches do do a good job switching up practices and who we play with, making sure that we get comfortable playing with everyone, because we know that we get in foul trouble every once in a while. And Tamin was hurt at the beginning of the year, so he was out for four weeks. So that kind of allowed for us to play together some different lineups.

I think our staff does a good job putting confidence in us, letting us know that we're ready and that we can do that. Obviously it's unfortunate with J-Jeff, but they're going to keep instilling confidence with us that, yeah, he's out, but we got other guys that can step up and play, and they're going to make some big-time plays tomorrow. I think our coaches do a really good job just doing that with us in practice and games.

Q. Blake, Otega Oweh is obviously one of the stars of the tournament so far with that shot last night. How much have you guys kind of seen that shot? It feels like it's gone viral. Have you kind of processed that at all, and what do you take away from Oweh and the scouting report?

BLAKE BUCHANAN: Yeah. He's a good player. He's a big part of their offense and big part of their team. So we're going to do a good job guarding him and not letting him get going. Obviously that shot was big. It's part of basketball. It happens. We were watching it live, but once that's over, you know, it's overtime, and they won and we were kind of just focusing on our game. So I wouldn't say we were kind of blown away by it. It's March. That stuff happens. So I was just kind of like, he hit the big shot. Good for him. Good for that team and, you know, do a good job on him tomorrow.

Q. I heard Coach say that Iowa State has the best fanbase out there. I think people from Kentucky may beg to differ. But what does make your fanbase the greatest one out there?

JAMARION BATEMON: I think just they're always

committed to us regardless of the situation. Like some schools, they may go down 20, and their fans are kind of out of the game. But like our fans, we're down 20, we're up 20, they're still cheering us on. And then they travel, as well. And so I feel like they're just committed to us.

Q. Blake, what is it like having a game against Tennessee State that's a larger margin compared to Kentucky having an overtime game? How does that help you prepare and reset and rest?

BLAKE BUCHANAN: Yeah. Obviously some of our minds maybe have not been as high. It's not as stressful. So I think just after the game you're able to kind of decompress a little bit faster, take care of your body a little bit more. It's just, you know, when you kind of can not coast towards the end, but you just kind of know that you got that win and you got it sealed, I think mentally it puts you in a really good spot.

But, yeah, I mean obviously having the day off is big. It's not like a conference tournament. So our staff does a good job getting us to do recovery and stretching and making sure that we stay healthy. And then obviously we have practice today, and they do a good job taking care of us.

Either way, you gotta be ready to play. If we did play a lot like Kentucky did, we'd still be ready. Doesn't really matter.

Q. You guys talk all the time about getting out in transition, that T.J. talks about that with the defense being your best offense. Kentucky is one of the longest teams in college basketball. Do you put more of an emphasis on that against a team like this?

DOMINYKAS PLETA: Yeah. As I said, we always try to play fast so they can't set up their defense. And especially against Kentucky, we just try to play them faster so we can beat them.

JAMARION BATEMON: Yeah. I'd definitely say we probably put more of an emphasis on it, especially because maybe their half court defense may be a little tougher with their lens. So if you get out in transition and score before they can get set, you can have a lot of success.

Q. Blake, specifically, what can we look for in the first four minutes of the game to show that you guys are completely locked in?

BLAKE BUCHANAN: Yeah. It's going to start on the defensive end. I think if we can turn them over early, that's going to be big. Our defense goes into offense. So just



making sure that we got physical tags, we talk about that all the time, limiting them on the boards, second-chance points.

You know, they want to get out in the fast break. So limit that. So if we can kind of do those things in those first four minutes, we always talk about trying to shut their spirit down. So if we can do that in those first four minutes and kind of just set the tone, I think that will be big for us.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

