

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

Sunday, March 22, 2026

St. Louis, Missouri, USA

Enterprise Center

Iowa State Cyclones

T.J. Otzelberger

Tamin Lipsey

Nate Hiese

Milan Momcilovic

Media Conference

Iowa State 82, Kentucky 63

T.J. OTZELBERGER: First, credit to Kentucky, Coach Pope. Great season. We knew what a formidable opponent they'd be. A lot of respect for the job they do, and we knew we had to be at our best.

Proud of our guys. Felt like the game certainly didn't start the way we would like. Defensively, our pressure as the game wore on, continued to pay dividends for us and generate turnovers, be able to score off of our defense.

For us, we take so much pride in the habits and the things we do every single day, and really proud of our guys for how we pressured the ball, how we rebounded the ball and how we shared it and played for one another. Those are things that we really strive to be elite and have excellence in, and our guys really showed up in a major way in those areas for us today.

Great team win. Really proud of our group.

Q. After Killyan hit that spinning lay-up, you let out a quick smile. How did having an elite backcourt with Killyan and Lipsey help you guys?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Both guys are fierce competitors. For Killyan to be able to learn from Tamin every day has been amazing. Killyan brings such tremendous effort, a guy who, again, he's a freshman, doesn't play like a freshman. He competes at such a high level.



It was just one of those moments as a coach you're really proud of him because you know how he works every single day. At some point you want to be in that moment with him, and I felt like that was an opportunity to do that.

Q. For Coach and Nate, what did Nate bring that fans can't see in a box score today, when J-Jeff goes down and you put a senior like Nate into the starting lineup?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Well, Nate has been essentially our sixth starter all year, even when he hasn't started on the court. I say it over and over again; Nate Heise is someone who's a fierce competitor, defensively has tremendous pride, getting stops, team defense, getting traffic rebounds, making plays. You can feel that compete every possession. Offensively he steps up and does what's needed for our team.

Obviously back to back double-figure scoring games. I mean, look, Nate is somebody for me that I just have tremendous belief and confidence in, and I know what he can do, and I know what he'll continue to do.

You're really proud of guys when they continue to challenge themselves to be at their best, and Nate is somebody that we see do it every single day, and fortunate that it showed up for him again today.

NATE HEISE: Yeah, just to reiterate what he said, whenever my number needs to be called, I feel like I'm up for that challenge. Today was one of the -- obviously the biggest game of the year, and I wouldn't have wanted to be in any other spot. I'm just thankful for the belief that he has in me, my teammates have in me, and I love playing with them. So I want to keep doing that as long as I can.

Q. You had 26 points, 10 assists, first double-double of the season. How much of an extra onus did you put on yourself to step up with Joshua out?

TAMIN LIPSEY: Yeah, obviously with J-Jeff out of the lineup and not playing in the game, he's the best player on our team. So just all the guys knew that we had to step up in different ways and however that presented it to us.

For me it was just being aggressive, getting downhill early, drawing some fouls, getting to the line. That kind of set the



momentum for me. Didn't hit a three until the second half, but once that happened, I felt really good about my offense and teammates kept looking for me, things like that.

Like you said, the double-double first of the year, looking for my teammates. I think Milan was the one that got me to my 10th assist on a nice step-back three. That's a tough shot.

But just credit to my teammates for being ready when the ball comes their way.

Q. You mentioned getting downhill, putting pressure on the rim. You obviously struggled to shoot it, 9-of-31 from the floor. How important was it to get to the rim, get to the foul line and score that way?

TAMIN LIPSEY: Like you said, we didn't shoot the ball well in the first half. So it was super important to attack, get easy ones from the line or get easy lay-ups or transition lay-ups because that helped us stay in the game along with creating turnovers and the defensive end in that first half.

Q. For TJ and Tamin, how would you describe the offense today, and can you talk about how you overcame the challenge of playing without J-Jeff?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: First the offense. I credit these guys. They really paced our offense and made sure that early we didn't spend too much -- we didn't score too many points and we didn't make too many shots. I think they waited until prior to half, when Tamin got the big assist to Heise for the three to take the lead.

So I credit our guys for understanding to have that pace because we started 9-for-31 and 1-for-14 from three, and then in the second half we just made all our shots.

That was a great plan. I didn't know our players were going to do that, but I credit them for doing an unbelievable job of pacing it that way.

When you go out there and you don't have J-Jeff, the guy is an elite competitor, a winner, been such a great leader for us, so we miss him in so many aspects. But our guys know that if we count on each other, we trust each other and we believe in one another, that we can accomplish anything. The best way we can honor him at this point is to continue to play our best.

He's vocal in the locker room. He's there in practice. He's still laying it on the line. He's with us every step of the way.

Q. TJ, on Jefferson, do you guys have an extended timetable now that there's been more time on when he

could be able to return?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, he has an MRI tomorrow at 11:00 a.m., so we'll see how that goes and take it from there.

Q. Y'all were able to create a ton of turnovers in both halves. Why do you think the case?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: These guys are relentless competitors. They work for it every day. They're connected defensively and offensively. They're relentless. Their spirit, their desire to win, competitive endurance when things get hard. They're an unbelievable group.

Q. I wanted to ask you about how you guys overcame the challenge today without Joshua.

TAMIN LIPSEY: Yeah, I think just knowing that's the next-guy-up mentality. Obviously started with Heise jumping in that starting lineup, but I think one thing that really helped us with was just playing fast and playing with pace. I feel like we played great off the ball. Heise did a great job just ripping drives and getting downhill. It's something that's a little different from J-Jeff's game.

So made us harder to guard, I think, and got them in rotations, got us different looks, and I think it was something that really that opened up the floor for us.

Q. Milan and Nate, everyone knows how much Tamin means to your program and how successful you've been because of his contributions. Was today kind of his masterpiece performance with Joshua out to score 26 points, have a double-double and everything that he did?

MILAN MOMCILOVIC: Yeah, I mean, I love playing with him. He just does a little bit of everything for us. He stepped up in the biggest game when we needed him to. He needed to be a playmaker, score, do a little bit of everything. 26 points, I think maybe career high? I'm not sure. And first double-double.

He's just a competitor like TJ said, and he looks for me in transition and in the half court. So he's just a joy to play with.

NATE HEISE: Yeah, I agree with that. That play before halftime, to have the confidence he had in me when he probably could have had a lay-up, too. I think that just shows what type of player he is.

And going into games like this when you know it could be your last, when you have a guy like Tamin who you know is

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

going to put it on the line, who isn't going to let us lose, that's how I felt all year is how much pride he played with and how much he cares about Iowa State, that he's not going to let us lose in these big games. That's why I really respect him and enjoy playing with him.

Q. TJ, you gave some sort of a quote on Thursday about how the program views adversity as a challenge or something like that. Is it fair to say that this weekend is almost a microcosm of your program?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: I mean, for us, adversity just creates opportunity for us to be at our best. We work every single day for those habits and that consistency of those habits. You know what, when you do that and you have character guys who continue to stay committed to the process, things go your way in the biggest moments.

I think everything that comes our way is a blessing. It's an opportunity. We're going to continue to take it as it comes and be at our absolute best.

Q. Milan, how did you notice Joshua's leadership impact take shape over the course of the last couple days and especially as you had to power through those early first-half offensive struggles?

MILAN MOMCILOVIC: Yeah, I think he was just being vocal in the locker room before the game, and at halftime he kind of told us what he was seeing and how we could get better shots, because it was kind of a feeling-out process in the first half a little bit playing without him.

So we kind of just needed to regroup at halftime and we knew we weren't going to play much worse offensively than we did in the first half.

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