

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - Tennessee vs Iowa State

Thursday, March 26, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Iowa State Cyclones
Coach T.J. Otzelberger

Nate Heise

Tamin Lipsey

Milan Momcilovic

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

Q. For all of you, Tennessee is the No. 1 offensive rebounding team in the country. What does that mean? How much focus has been put on that, Tamin, especially with the guards helping on the glass?

NATE HEISE: Yeah, it's been a big emphasis the last couple days just looking at their size. They go hard. Respect to them for doing what they're good at, and obviously something that we're focused on trying to eliminate.

TAMIN LIPSEY: Yeah, just to piggyback off of Nate, for us guards, obviously it's going to be a lot of helping down for our guys shooting a perimeter shot or getting back. It's going to be helping crack down on the bigger guys and fly around to get those loose ball rebounds and just do the same thing. But obviously we know they have size, and like you said, they're the No. 1 offensive rebounding team. So again, like Nate said, that's something that we've talked about for sure.

MILAN MOMCILOVIC: I think it just depends what Joshua's status is. But they've got to play bigger because I think they start 6'11" at the 4 and 6'10" at the 3, so we'll be guarding both those guys. So we've just got to keep them off the glass and make sure they don't get a whole ton of them.

Q. Tamin and Nate, is it any different in this system, the status of getting a rebound as a guard, or compared to as a 5 man?



TAMIN LIPSEY: I'd say it's definitely different. I think just being guards, you're not often the ones in the paint boxing out. You're coming from the outside or you're trying to locate where the shot is going from and where you think the ball is going to go. It's more trying to predict; whereas bigs, they're the ones down there hitting each other.

So we have a little bit more freedom to roam around and try to get rebounds that way.

NATE HEISE: Yeah, I'd say same thing, a little bit of both. I do a bit of boxing out and going to get the rebound.

I think a big thing like he mentioned is, looking at the flight of the ball and seeing where it's going to go and try to get a lot of ones that aren't by the rim, but ones that end up going outside to the elbow or whatever.

Q. Milan, you've talked about working with a sports psychologist this season, specifically the jelly beans thing before you shoot. Can you talk about how that started and how that's helped you?

MILAN MOMCILOVIC: Yeah, I think he tried to tell me I've got to think about something before I shoot so I'm not thinking about my shot. Because previous years, I would always think maybe something is wrong with my shot, maybe I'm not holding my follow through, maybe the arc on the ball is not the best. So he said just think about something, just one word before you shoot, and he came up with the word.

I try to use it, but it doesn't happen every time because I'm thinking about other stuff during the game. But that was kind of one tip he used. I'm shooting way better this year than I was last year, so it probably worked a little bit.

Q. Nate, obviously your role most of the season is a little more the non-scoring stuff, but you've had to step up in the scoring department. How has your role changed in the last couple games since Jefferson went down?

NATE HEISE: Yeah, I think it's just being aggressive and picking my spots when to be aggressive. He obviously has a lot of usage, he has the ball a lot, and when he was out,



we needed other people to step up and do those jobs, whether it's me, Killyan, Bateman. It's really everybody. So just having a more aggressive mindset and focusing on that more than I have done in the past.

Q. Tamin, really outstanding point guards in this little bracket here this weekend. Talk about the challenge of going against outstanding point guards.

TAMIN LIPSEY: Yeah, I mean, all the teams that are in the Sweet 16 obviously have great point guards. I think that's something that's huge for college basketball, but just teams in general. The point guards are kind of the coach on the floor and that's how our team is run. Like you said, just here in Chicago, all the separate teams, all have great point guards.

And obviously a great matchup against Gillespie and then the other two from Michigan and Alabama, as well. It's something that's super important. And I think you see on those teams that make deep runs and ultimately come out on top, it's those teams that have those point guards that can control the game.

Q. Nate, this is the second straight year where offensively you've taken a step in the NCAA Tournament scoring the ball. Do you feel like you have a little bit of extra confidence coming into the tournament and where does that come from?

NATE HEISE: Yeah, I think it's also like a motivation, as well, increased amount of motivation because you just know it could be your last game. Even last year, it's not my last season, but you've got four months until you start playing again.

I would just say it's a sense-of-urgency thing.

T.J. OTZELBERGER: It's an honor to be here in Chicago. Just thrilled about this opportunity for our team. We have tremendous respect for our opponent, for Coach Barnes, the Tennessee program, all they've been able to accomplish. Very impressive team. They play with a lot of heart, a lot of grit, a lot of tenacity.

We know it's going to be a big challenge. Our guys have not shied away from the challenge all year, and that will be the case again tomorrow night.

Excited to have this opportunity.

Q. Any new updates on Joshua Jefferson and his status ahead of tomorrow night?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, there's nothing new at this

point. We're going to give him every opportunity up until the game to do everything he can. He's a fierce competitor. Our medical staff has been amazing, and he's continued to work diligently.

But at this point, it would be premature to make any type of determination until we get closer to tip.

Q. Coach, with Jefferson going down early in that first game, Nate Heise had to take a step up offensively. How do you feel like he's responded?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Well, Nate Heise has always stepped up for us especially when we needed him the most. He plays with tremendous spirit, passion. He's a winner, makes big shots, big plays, loves to guard the other team's best player.

For our team, Nate Heise continues to show in the biggest moments who he is and what he can do. I will continue to say that he will play well as we move forward.

Q. I know this isn't foremost on your mind, but your name has come up with the vacancy at North Carolina. How do you balance dealing with that kind of stuff while you're still coaching a team in the NCAA Tournament, the speculation? And do you have any comment on the opening in general?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, I would say any time your name comes up in a positive light, it's a credit to the young men in your program, the work that they do and that sort of thing.

In terms of future and that sort of thing, for us, we're at Iowa State. We're thrilled to be Cyclones. I know a lot of coaches get up here and say those type of things and then you say, well, next week that changes. That doesn't change for us. We're Cyclones for the long haul. We're thrilled at the experience we've had up to this point, and we're excited for a future even better than the five years we've had.

I couldn't be more excited about our future. I couldn't be more thrilled for what we have in front of us, and couldn't be more proud of being part of Cyclone basketball.

I think the programs that you study that are at the highest level have tremendous alignment. And if you look at what we have on our campus and throughout, from our athletic department and our president, with David Cook and Jamie Pollard, and the synergy and the communication and the strength and leadership that we have, there wouldn't be any other place in America I'd rather be than Iowa State.



Q. What do you expect with Lipsey and Gillespie matchup, a couple of seniors leading their teams? It seems pretty special.

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, two unbelievable players. Gillespie, everywhere he goes, he just impacts winning. He makes so many big plays and big shots for them. He's a fierce competitor, season leader, all those things.

We know with Tamin for us, the guy is just a competitor. He finds a way to win. He finds a way to make big plays.

You look at how he's played here lately, maybe coming off as strong of a performance, certainly offensive performance, as he's had in his college career.

It proves to be a really exciting matchup, two tremendous players that impact winning for their team in so many ways, and excited to see how it unfolds.

Q. The commitment that you've made or the statements you've made about how you feel about Iowa State suggest you feel like you can win a National Championship where you are. How do you sustain that at Iowa State in this era where obviously so much is about money?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, we sustain success. We have a model that we're confident in and we believe in. We understand the landscape that we're currently in in college athletics. I look at the coaches who I revere and look up to. Tony Bennett is like my big brother and somebody that I always seek counsel and advice from.

What Tony shares with me over and over again is be who you are, don't change, stay true to yourself, double down on your core values and your beliefs. And those things are good and those things will stand the test of time.

That's what we believe, and that's how we continue to do things.

We're proud of how we continue to move forward as an institution, an athletic department, and a basketball program.

There comes a point in this where when you're in the spot that I'm in, that chip on your shoulder you've always had, when people tend to ask questions, why would you want to do this or why do you believe that? It gives us even more fuel for our fire, for what we know we can do and what's in front of us. We could not be more excited about the opportunity that lies ahead.

Q. On Joshua, whose final decision is it? And

knowing that it's a game-time decision, how do you prepare for the eventuality that he either will play or won't play?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, it's ultimately Joshua's decision. We love him. We support him. We're going to give him all the information and resources.

But it ultimately comes down to he's a fierce competitor. He's a warrior. He'll do anything to be out there for his teammates. I know if that's a possibility that he will take advantage of it.

How we prepare or plan if he's not to be able to play, honestly, I think the Kentucky game speaks for itself. I think our guys have a very connected mentality and mindset. They're very unified offensively and defensively. They believe in one another. They started a process in June where they've been part of hard work, daily habits, commitment to one another for, shoot, nine, ten months.

You're going to rely on those habits in the biggest moment in the biggest games, and that's what we're going to seek to do tomorrow night.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

