

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

Friday, March 27, 2026

Chicago, Illinois, USA

United Center

Iowa State Cyclones

Coach T.J. Otzelberger

Nate Heise

Tamin Lipsey

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Tennessee 76, Iowa State 62

THE MODERATOR: We are now joined by Iowa State head Coach T.J. Otzelberger along with student-athletes Nate Heise and Tamin Lipsey. Coach, if you would like to start with an opening statement.

T.J. OTZELBERGER: First, congratulations to Tennessee. Coach Barnes, their program is first class. Just a lot of respect for them. They're a very good team. Very good team. Certainly the better team tonight.

On the other side, really proud of our group. Again, for us, you know, we aim every night to lay it on the line. I feel like our guys do that every night. Proud of our team. Our performance tonight doesn't diminish anything we accomplished this season, and really proud of this group. Been as enjoyable group to be around as I've ever had. Tough to have it come to an end.

THE MODERATOR: Let's take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. You guys both left out there. What are your reflections, and how do you -- what has Iowa State meant to you?

NATE HEISE: Yeah, it's just really gratitude. Growing up I never really thought I would be a Division I basketball player, and then I went to UNI. Then I never thought I would be a high major player, and then I came here. Just the opportunities Coach has given me, I couldn't be more grateful to him and then the other coaches along with him.



The guys I've gotten to know here, I've had so many good memories outside of basketball, playing the game with them. I just can't be more grateful.

TAMIN LIPSEY: That's a perfect word to use, grateful. Just for the whole experience, whole basketball career. Obviously not over. Hoping to continue to play, but just looking back on my four years, it was a quick four years. I loved every second of it, the highs, the lows. All of it made me a better player, a better person. Thanks to T.J. and the coaches and how the program is ran.

I think Heise and I can say we left it in a better place than we came in.

Q. Tamin, you are one of just 22 four-year seniors at the high major ranks. Can you just reflect for me on this journey for you and maybe how your experience is a little bit different and what your message would be to other guys, maybe determining whether they're going to hit the portal next month or next week?

TAMIN LIPSEY: I think it's all about finding the right fit for you. From day one when the first time I talked to T.J. and he offered me, I just felt that connection, that relationship, and it just continued to grow from that first day forward.

It's never easy. It's never perfect, but you continue to grow as a person and as a player. I feel like I grew each year and every year, got better every year. I just knew that it was a place that was going to help me become what I wanted to become.

Didn't want to leave and go somewhere that didn't fit me and the player I am and the play style. I think that's something that's super important is just finding a place that fits who you are as a player and having that trust and relationship with the coaches.

Q. Tamin, you talked earlier in the week about not wanting the season to end. What do you think the emotions are going to be taking the jersey off for the last time?

TAMIN LIPSEY: Yeah, it will probably -- I mean, I'll probably be hurting for the next week just thinking about



each day. I know I'm going to think about it. It's hard. It's everything I've put into it. I'm just grateful.

Sorry. This jersey means everything to me, what's on the front of it. I'm just happy with what I was able to contribute to the program.

Q. Nate, to follow up, Tamin has obviously meant a ton to Iowa State basketball over the last four years. He's laid it out on the line. From your perspective, what does he mean to Iowa State basketball and Cyclone fans?

NATE HEISE: When you think back on Iowa State in 20 years, he'll be one of the first couple of guys you think about. That's what makes him so special. Just being able to get to know him the last two years, you really get to see the emotional side and the kindness that he shows, the way he influences the community of Ames.

I've never seen anybody go out of his way to do it as much as he has. Rooming with him the past year, you see he's never thinking about himself. He's always thinking about what he can do for other people.

On the court, I've said this a lot of times, it's just a sense of confidence you get playing with him, knowing that he's not going to let you lose games. I remember that Iowa game we were down. I thought there's no way Tamin is going to allow this to happen in his last year at Hilton.

The way that he is as a person and the way that he is as a player, he's one of the best teammates I've ever had.

Q. Tamin, it was kind of like you were a little bit of a coach to the freshmen guards, watching you this year. How good can those guys be?

TAMIN LIPSEY: Man, they can be better than me I think. Just how they come in and work every day as freshmen, it's really cool to see. Not all freshmen act how they act. They're very mature, and they wanted to learn every day.

It wasn't easy for them. It's never easy for freshmen, but they continued to fight through the season. Really just pleased to leave the program with them and see what they can do. I think just for me it was just leading by example as much as I could for those guys and just showing them the ropes in the early days and just showing how much passion and fight we have in this program.

It was really easy, because those guys have that naturally. I think that they're going to keep leading this program in the right direction.

THE MODERATOR: Thanks, guys. Questions for Coach.

Q. What was the game plan to rebound defensively against this team, especially without Jefferson, and what went wrong?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: I think obviously their size and physicality is imposing. We knew that it would be a tremendous challenge. I think the most important thing when it comes to rebounding is that you stay in front of the play defensively, guard the dribble, stay out of rotation.

They did a great job playing the short roll to their big, moving the basketball out of there. We were able to turn them over some, but not enough. Then that put us in some tough spots rebounding-wise where, again, they've got tremendous size, athleticism, and commitment to the glass. They're the best offensive rebounding team in the country, and it certainly proved true tonight.

Q. T.J., what did they do to Milan that made his night kind of miserable trying to even get a shot off?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, I mean, they really didn't give him any space anywhere. Every time he would come off a pindown, screening action, or be on the move, they were into his body. They were physical. They were aggressive. They were very intentional. They kept length and physicality in his space at all times, so he couldn't move as freely as we like.

Milan has done such a great job as a problem solver and finding opportunities and creating space for himself, but that was just one of those games where they were better. They had better solutions defensively than what we were able to have offensively.

Q. Obviously Tamin gets emotional up here thinking about his career in an Iowa State uniform. I know you've reflected on it in the past, but now that it's over, how hard will it be to not have him on your roster next year?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, Tamin is not only one of the greatest winners I've ever been around or seen, he's one of the greatest people. He's had such a profound impact on our program, our community, our university, our campus. The man that he is, the leader that he is.

Look, we've built this entire program around who he is as a person, who he is as a player, because the trust, belief, confidence, appreciation we have for him. He's one of those guys, he's a generational player. You know as a coach when you have one of them, and you know you're not blessed or fortunate enough to have them very often,

so you cherish every day.

It's one thing I told myself going into this season with him is that we're going to appreciate and cherish every single day with Tamin, and just as a coach, couldn't be more proud of any young person than what we are of him and all that he's done to impact the campus, community, and program.

Q. You talked earlier about the margins being so small once you get to this point in the NCAA Tournament. Having been here a couple of times, what do you think the difference is between getting to the next step and falling short like you guys did tonight?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, I mean, I think each year is different, independent variables that come into play. It's difficult when you have a guy like Joshua that is as impactful for your team as he is for us, because that changes a lot.

I think being healthy is probably important, for sure. Look, each year presents different challenges. I think certainly without him, the physicality on the interior was a tough obstacle for us to overcome here tonight.

We'll be back. We'll find solutions, and we'll have our breakthrough.

Q. Coach, what did you see Tennessee do well that kind of made you guys adjust your game plan more towards that second half?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: They did a great job out of halftime for sure of putting us in rotation, playing through the short roll. They consistently finished plays and made shots. You know, we take pride coming out of that locker room and throwing the first punch. They were just a lot more aggressive than we were.

They made great decisions. I think, you know, the margin and physicality on the glass certainly impacted the game, but I just think overall credit to their guys for how they took care of the basketball, how they played for one another. You can tell they're a very connected team.

Q. I know Joshua was diligent with his rehab. How close was he to playing tonight, and what was your message to him after the game?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, I mean, more than anything just the message is appreciation for everything he's done for our program. I mean, what a tough blow to be dealt. You know, you're in the NCAA Tournament. You dream of being there your whole life, and you get there, and you have the team that you think can really make a run, and

then to have kind of a fluke thing happen where he goes down and then his ankle.

Just a really tough circumstance to deal with. So we just wanted to make sure that Joshua felt supported, and we did everything in our power to get him ready to be out there and play. It just wasn't enough.

He did all he could. He's a fierce competitor. He couldn't have done more treatments and had more preparation to put himself in position, but just didn't work out that way.

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