

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

Wednesday, March 27, 2024

Boston, Massachusetts, USA

TD Garden

**Illinois Fighting Illini**

**Brad Underwood**

**Marcus Domask**

**Coleman Hawkins**

**Quincy Guerrier**

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, Coach. Opening statement, please.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Obviously very excited to be here in Boston. We felt like we handled business. Took care of what we needed to take care of in Omaha. Two very good opponents.

I thought other than the start of the Morehead game, I thought we played pretty well. Now it's on to a very, very good Iowa State team. Obviously the No. 1 defense in college basketball. They do that for a reason. T.J. has done just an outstanding job of getting these guys to play so very hard. It's very impressive.

As a coach I watch their team, and I know what they emphasize. I know what they work on. You beat the No. 1 seed, Houston, twice. That's very, very impressive. Obviously winning the Big 12 Tournament, which was the No. 1 rated conference this year.

My hats off to Iowa State, to T.J., to that group, and they're led by two very, very good guards, very athletic, and a team that, like I said, obviously causes teams a lot of problems scoring.

We'll have to be very good, and excited for the opportunity.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.



**Q. Can you just talk to us about just makes you proud of the culture and just what makes this team so different?**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Yeah, I think we've tried to establish a work ethic. We're a program of development. We say all the time we're every day guys. You see that throughout our building, on our shirts, on our gear.

To show up and have to work every single day to get better, to be accountable, to be responsible. That's only done by hard work and by a group of guys that want to put in that time and that want to buy into that. They've set standards for themselves that they want to achieve. Not goals. Standards.

This group is very mature and handled that. This group has been as fun a group as I have ever been around. They've added years to my coaching life. I know that. Just simply being along on the ride with them has made it fun.

They've adhered to everything we've tried to do and listened, and that makes it really enjoyable.

**Q. Brad, as more eyes are pulled to your team during this run, do you see any issue with your leading scorer, who is a representation of this team and this university, not being available to the media?**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: No. That's obviously a very serious situation. We're very well aware of that. I think that there's -- I think there's communication that he has to have with his legal counsel and so on and so forth to be aware of what's in his best interest and moving forward. We're going to adhere to that.

The university has put out their statements on those situations, and we're going to adhere to all that, and we're going to play basketball and do it to the best of our ability and keep trying to win games.

**Q. Coach, as you know, No. 1 offense against the No. 1 defense. What do you guys have to do against them to make sure that clash of strengths goes to your advantage?**



BRAD UNDERWOOD: Well, they're very good. They're going to play exceptionally hard. I'm not oblivious to think that we won't turn the ball over a few times. You've got to be very decisive in your decisions. You've got to be ball-tough.

They have two guys in their guards that do a great job of raking, taking it out of your hands. They're in constant rotation. You can't do the same thing every time. They'll set on it after a time or two.

Then you've got to try to avoid the pick-6's. Take the five-second count if you're in trouble, punt it 24 rows up into the stands. Just don't jump up in the air and throw it and let them get an uncontested layup that we can't defend on our end.

They're good, and then we've just got to be decisive in our decision-making.

**Q. What was your reaction to the accusations and then your reaction to the court proceedings that allowed Terrence to come back?**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I've said many times I'm a college basketball coach. When we found out it was our athletic director Josh Whitman that informed me. Then it was to a decision that was made by the university, and then obviously taken to the courts, and I've said all along I was going to coach the guys I had in the locker room. I was going to be the best supporter of those guys that I coach every day. We had to find a way to flourish through those tough times.

Then when he came back and joined us, he was a part of our team again. He has always been a great teammate. We got him back, and here we sit today.

**Q. I think part of the novelty of the tournament is getting to see your path, find out where you might be playing, what cities you get to go to. What's the excitement of playing in Boston, playing in a city like this where it's known for sports and being as iconic as it is and also getting to play on the Sweet 16 stage?**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Well, I think there's a lot of things to that question. One, you're in the Sweet 16. You're in one of the premiere sporting events in all the world.

Then you get to do it here in Boston, and all you have to do is look up at the rafters, and you're doing it in -- I don't know. You start looking up through, I don't know, '57 or '59 and all the consecutive World Championships and know what this city is about in terms of basketball. Larry Bird

and Red Auerbach and Bill Russell, John Havlicek. You go right on down the list, and those are all names that are synonymous with the greats.

Yeah, it's great that it's here in Boston, it's in this iconic building and place, and it coincides with the fact the Celtics are really good again this year, but we're doing it in the Sweet 16. So really excited about all that.

**Q. Obviously Iowa State puts a ton of pressure on the ball. How do you prepare for that this week in practice?**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Well, we've got a pretty good one. Sencire Harris is a pretty good defender, so we get to see that.

But you don't. You can't replicate truly their athleticism. King, all those guys up front are so athletic and quick, but you talk about doing certain things and creating certain habits and being ball-tough, but we've got to apply all those things tomorrow.

I think we can -- with Dravyn and Sencire, we can get after the ball pretty good in practice, but it is different when you have size and length like that up front coming.

**Q. Can you speak to the challenges of your coaching staff and also yourself with preparing for the Sweet 16 matchup and also navigating the transfer portal as well?**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Yeah, I spent all morning on the portal, believe it or not. I don't know. It's unfortunate timing I think. It is what it is. The calendar was put in place for a reason. I spent late into last night again on Iowa State and got up early this morning and prepped for practice and our workout today and then had to work on the portal.

We know what we're losing in terms of guys eligibility-wise. You're out making those calls. There's no rest in that. When the season is over, it gets amped up even more. I mean, there's no downtime. It is crank it up.

Our staff is working hard at that. We're paying attention daily to what's going on in the portal, and if you're not, you're probably falling behind.

**Q. This year Alfonso Plummer on the Big Ten title team, why do you think it is that you've been able to get the most out of those guys? What is it about Illinois as a program that allows them to play their best basketball?**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I think we've been really honest with them. I don't think we've tried to identify -- I think we've tried very hard to identify high-character guys that fit. I think we've tried to find guys that have specific needs to what we're looking for.

Then it's been a great match. It's been a marriage that's worked both ways. I think when you're honest with guys, you're not telling them you're going to make him a lottery pick. When they're coming from wherever, you are honest with them and tell them how they fit and what the pieces are, there's no surprises.

We've got a great situation. We've had success, and I think there are people out there who want to be a part of that.

**Q. Charlie Baker, the NCAA president, came out this morning advocating against prop betting on individual players in college athletics games and said they were going to move forward to try to make that illegal. I'm wondering as a coach if that's something you would support?**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: 100 percent. We have competitive integrity, and I think that's the one thing that we can never jeopardize. I think in the Big Ten we've been very, very proactive in terms of putting out an injury report before games to help protect student-athletes and coaches. I'm a big fan of that.

I would hate to see the day where nobody jumps for the jump ball because of a prop bet. To me the greatness of college athletics is the competitive integrity that we have, and we should be able to keep that.

**Q. Based on your comments there on integrity, how serious are point shaving allegations across the sport, and in light of the Temple investigation, did that set off red flags for you and other coaches in the community there when that report came out a few weeks ago?**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I think you would be buried in a hole if you weren't paying attention to what goes on. I think speaking personally, we've got an athletic administration that has educated, worked as hard as they can work in helping us as coaches educate our student-athletes on it.

I think that it's real in terms of it's something that if you don't address it, shame on you. I think that's all we can do is keep talking about it, keep trying to educate our student-athletes on what's out there and what's surrounding them, but I know personally we do an incredible job of talking to our student-athletes about all those experiences.

You hate to hear when it happens, but again, we're going to do everything at the University of Illinois we can do to try to educate our people about it.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up to questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. For any of you guys, how would you describe the way Terrence has played for the last month. Big Ten tournament, NCAA Tournament. What's it been like watching his performance?**

COLEMAN HAWKINS: Personally I think it's been great. He has done a great job of just being a dominant player. I feel like a lot of times it gets tough in the postseason because everybody knows your actions, but we've been keeping everything pretty simple. He's done a great job of being a reliable source to go out and score at any given moment, whether a play breaks down or not. Seeing his speed, his physicality dominate matchups, it's been really great to see for sure.

**Q. This is for Quincy and Marcus, Illinois has had a tradition of having transfers come in here and really thrive. What is it about the program or the coaching staff that allows you guys to have this level of success coming in here.**

QUINCY GUERRIER: I think the culture when I first got here, everybody was always in the gym. We set our standards for the year too, and we really just made sure that we were respecting those standards. I think that's why it really translates our success to those standards.

MARCUS DOMASK: Yeah, I think Coach just leaves no confusion on what's expected. As a one-year guy you don't have a long time to kind of figure it out, and he leaves no confusion.

Then in the portal he kind of talks about it. It's kind of appealing as a one-year guy to see the success that other guys have had and the way that Coach uses us.

**Q. This is for Coleman. Obviously you guys are the No. 1 offense in the country. They're the No. 1 defense in the country. What has to happen for you to make sure the battle of strengths goes in your advantage?**

COLEMAN HAWKINS: I think the biggest thing is keeping it simple. I think not trying to hit home runs, making the extra pass, and then being what we talk about ball-tough is a big key.

Live ball turnovers for them lead to buckets. They score a

lot off of those turnovers. Coach uses the term pick-6's.

So limiting those, being ball-tough, making simple plays, stepping up and knocking down open shots because they're going to come. Those open shots are going to come when they double-team the Booty Ball offense that we have. Stepping up, making those shots, not turning the ball over is our key to success for sure.

**Q. For Coleman and Marcus, Coach talked about how impactful Sencire Harris and Dra Gibbs-Lawhorn has been in preparing for Iowa State's ball pressure. Can you speak to what they've done in practice to make you uncomfortable heading into the game?**

COLEMAN HAWKINS: I think Sencire does a great job. At times he runs around and does his own thing, but when he is giving us great looks, him and Dra, offensively and defensively, just crawling up in us, making our catches tough, and just trying his best as possible to simulate those defensive coverages and trying to replicate how hard teams play. Sencire is always guarding Terrence and Marcus every day. Same thing with Dra.

Then offensively making us work extremely hard in practice. Sometimes I hate guarding Sencire because he's like going full speed, and I'm at 50 percent still trying to get warmed up. It's like the first drill, and he is already trying to serve you and make you look stupid.

But no, they do a great job of just bringing the energy and intensity and making us work hard. Not only them two, but the whole entire scout team for sure.

**Q. This question is for Marcus. I'm curious how your four years at Southern Illinois prepared you and shaped you, got you ready for this final year that you're having with Illinois?**

MARCUS DOMASK: Yeah, I think I came from a really good program. I have a lot of respect for Coach Mullins and the way he ran things and the way he coached me. I think he did a really good job of just preparing me player development-wise and as a leader to kind of come in and make an impact. Obviously the one-year situation.

I think SIU does stuff at a high level compared to most mid-majors, through conversations that I've had with other people I've learned that. I think he as a coach helped me understand the game and understand how to come in and impact.

**Q. Marcus, kind of coming off of that, you obviously have an envisionment of what you're going to be at Illinois coming into things, but everything happened**

**so quickly in the portal. What have you found out about this place, this coaching staff, your teammates that's made this a perfect fit for you?**

MARCUS DOMASK: I think just the way that Coach Underwood kind of treats us. He treats us more as a professional team than a college team. We're an older team, and he kind of -- he allows us to be more player-led than coach-led. He gives us that leeway to kind of control our own destiny and how we operate some things. He puts a lot of trust in us.

I think just the trust he's put in us just kind of reflects our trust in him, and it's just kind of a two-way street.

**Q. Just a quick follow-up. Coleman, the two guys to your left, there's that dynamic with programs of guys who are back versus guys who come in. Why have they fit so well?**

COLEMAN HAWKINS: I think they're just being asked to do -- it's not like they're being asked to do too much or something they can't do. I think Quincy has done a great job of spacing the floor, knocking down open shots, being aggressive when he needs to be, offensive rebounding well. That's what Coach has told him to do.

Marcus has done a great job of embracing the role of the Booty Ball offense and taking his time and just being stronger than most guards. You know, powering through. Just using stuff that he works on every single day.

So I think just their opportunity and embracing the roles that they've been asked to do has been great, and it's worked out well. It's kind of morphed us into what we are today, which is the No. 1 offensive team in the country, so...

**Q. This question is for Marcus and for Quincy. Brad obviously, he gets on Terrence about not hitting the offensive boards. Can you talk about the importance of him doing that and what it does for the offense?**

QUINCY GUERRIER: When he defensive rebounds, our offense is way better. We run in transition. We push the ball. We are going to need him to defensive rebound tomorrow because they're a really good team. They're crashing the boards. Their fours and fives are really good. The guards are going to have to come help us and get rebounds.

When Terrence is rebounding, our offense is two different things.

MARCUS DOMASK: Rebounding a big emphasis that

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Coach has had since the summer. He definitely gets on Terrence a lot just because with Terrence's athletic ability, when he rebounds and we get out in transition, we're just a different team.

Coach's ability to kind of press the buttons on what he sees and what players can be better at I think is just really good.

**Q. Quincy, for you what type of performance do you have to have tomorrow for you to consider yourself to have had a successful game against the Cyclones?**

QUINCY GUERRIER: Just focusing on rebounding, and my defense has to be really aggressive, knock down shots, but it's going to be all about the team.

I think if we communicate, we stay connected, and we are aggressive defensively and we rebound, we'll have no trouble to win the game.

**Q. For Marcus, obviously your post-up game is something you were able to do at Southern Illinois, but where does that come from? How did you develop such an advanced low post game as a guard, and how has that benefited you at the highest level?**

MARCUS DOMASK: I give my dad a lot of credit. My dad coached me ever since I was super young, and he always kind of talked to me -- a phrase he always used was, There's two positions. You're either on the bench or on the court.

He always just talked about how you want to be able to do as many things as possible to stay on the court and just be versatile. Obviously I have some size, so I think he just did a really good job of coaching me on all aspects of the game. I think that was just one thing that he really coached me in.

**Q. For Quincy, I know we kind of talked Saturday about your last Sweet 16 experience. You haven't been in Boston long, but can you compare that year in Indy and the bubble to now? Just kind of the whole thing.**

QUINCY GUERRIER: It's two different things. I remember during the COVID year in the morning we had to wake up, go get COVID test. We were in our hotel. Couldn't go out.

Now I feel like I can enjoy more of the experience because we're traveling. We have more time for us. We have time to go to places and stuff, but just, like I said, really grateful to be in that position right now.

**Q. I guess for any of you. It's a late tip time, 10:00**

**p.m. local time. What do you do all day to I guess stay ready for that?**

QUINCY GUERRIER: Nap. Nap a little. Take a nap before the game, a few hours before the game. That's for me.

MARCUS DOMASK: I'll take a nap. We'll obviously get up and have shoot-around, so we kind of get our bodies moving, get our minds going, and take a nap, and next thing you know it's game time.

**Q. For any of you, I know after getting in the Sweet 16 you said that this wasn't the goal. That you guys were obviously hungry for more. Do you feel like that has been shown in the lead-up, the practices that you guys got that hunger and desire that you want?**

QUINCY GUERRIER: Yeah. We've been practicing really hard. I feel like everybody is locked in. We're having fun too. I think that's really important for us to have fun and just to be dialed in on the scouting report. Everybody has been tremendous, and the coaching staff as well.

**Q. Coleman, this is for you. I don't believe Coach Underwood pushed in his chair when he left a little bit ago, and I'm curious if you have a reaction to that?**

COLEMAN HAWKINS: It's disrespectful. Is this his chair right here?

THE MODERATOR: I think Marcus is sitting in it.

COLEMAN HAWKINS: We'll let him know next time. It won't happen again, I swear.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

