

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

Wednesday, March 27, 2024

Boston, Massachusetts, USA

TD Garden

Iowa State Cyclones

T.J. Otzelberger

Tamin Lipsey

Keshon Gilbert

Robert Jones

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. For the two guards, you guys have talked so much this season about the importance of being able to keep opponents out of the paint. How do you go about doing that against Marcus Domask and Terrence Shannon?

TAMIN LIPSEY: I would say sticking true to what we have done all season and what we do is be physical and dictate, go out there with physicality and just what we do I would say.

KESHON GILBERT: Yeah, pretty much the same thing he said. Do the same thing we've been working on since June, dictating, being physical. Yeah, that's pretty much it.

Q. Rob, to follow up, when they are able to get their wings or their guards into the paint, what role do you and Hason play in making it difficult for them to get a shot off cleanly?

ROBERT JONES: Same sort of thing still, that physicality piece, meeting them at the rim, not letting them get an easy shot off, but making sure we don't foul as well. Can't give them three points at the line. Making it hard to finish without fouling.

Q. For any of you guys, to have the nation's No. 1 defense certainly is impressive. You look at Coach.



He's got -- he looks like just a great guy, easy-going guy, but obviously inside the doors of your gym I got to imagine practices here very intense. Give us a peek behind the scenes of what an Iowa State practice looks like and how you guys have grown into the best defensive team in college basketball.

ROBERT JONES: I would say practices are super physical. We go after each other. Everything we do is competitive, starting with our stretch. Making sure that we keep a high level of intensity, high level of energy throughout practice.

Then the more intensity we can bring, the shorter practices can be just because we have that high intensity level, and we're getting a lot of stuff done at a high level during our practices.

TAMIN LIPSEY: Like Rob said, every drill we do is a competition. That brings out the best in each one of us. Especially those defensive drills, we take a lot of pride in. Being physical, there's not a lot of fouls that are caused, so you really have to go out there and just work for it and who wants it more at the end of the day? That's where our physicality and our defensive mindset comes from.

Q. Congrats on the great win over UH a couple of weeks ago. For all three of you, there's been a litany of sports betting scandals across the state. The quarterback from your school was suspended, but a few players were exonerated from that case. Just how much has Coach emphasized that if you make one bet, that's it. You could be off the team. It could jeopardize your future, NBA potential. It could cost you millions of dollars. Has that been a point of emphasis this year?

TAMIN LIPSEY: I would say a little bit, especially after what happened with the things in our state at the University of Iowa and Iowa State.

Just being aware of it is the most important thing. Obviously we know that we can't do those things. Just being more aware and having more people come and talk about it to us and just knowing the ins and outs and

ASAP sports . . . when all is said, we're done.®

everything that's not legal for us is something that was big in the offseason.

Really at the end of the day not thinking too much about the things that had went on and moving on from the stuff that happened at our university and just realizing how we can learn from it.

Q. For Tamin, I know that you didn't play against Terrence when you were in high school as he was at Texas Tech. You obviously remember watching him I'm sure and on film. What's the most impressive thing about his game?

TAMIN LIPSEY: I would say there's a few things. Definitely just his aggressiveness on the offensive side and his play-making ability, his speed. He uses his speed very well, and that's something that we're going to key in defensively trying to stop.

He's a great overall player, and looking forward to the matchup.

Q. Tamin, when you look from year one to year two, we knew coming in this season Coach talked about how you were going to take on an increased role for this team, and obviously you have. What was that process like looking back on it, and what's the reward here of knowing that you were going to get the keys to the car and that you have been able to drive it here to the Sweet 16?

TAMIN LIPSEY: Yeah, there was a lot of talk going into the offseason just about what they wanted to get out of me going into my sophomore year. Just knowing that the trust that the coaches, especially T.J., had, and the trust that he was putting in me to be one of those leaders for this team was big for me.

So just taking that next step, being a leader was something that was big. My work ethic is something that I take pride in and just going out there and just trying to do the best I can do and lead by example I would say. The team that we have this year has put in so much work, and it's been so easy to be a leader of this team because all those guys put in the same amount of work as me, and we enjoy this ride together.

Q. Just to follow up on that, all you guys are talking about how great Otz is. Do you have a favorite T.J. story? Are you guys scared of him?

TAMIN LIPSEY: No.

ROBERT JONES: More respect.

TAMIN LIPSEY: It's more of a respect thing for sure just knowing who he is. I wouldn't say there's any really stories that stick out. Just the passion that he shows for Iowa State and just coming after out of big wins and celebrating with the guys is something that's huge.

Q. So it's not true that when he walked down, you guys were playing Blackjack having a great time, right? All of a sudden he walks down, and Tamin gets all scared, doesn't say a thing.

TAMIN LIPSEY: I would say it's just his presence is well-known from everyone around him. Just how he holds himself to that standard.

Q. When you were recruited out of high school, Tyrese had just left, and I think a lot of people thought the program might take a step back because he transferred to Texas. How much of a chip on the shoulder was it for you coming in and kind of showing people in the way you do, which is really quietly, that, hey, you know what, I can be as good as him if not better?

TAMIN LIPSEY: Definitely just having that chip on my shoulder coming in, a lot of people's thoughts was I was going to be backup to him, and obviously things worked out the way they worked out, and I was able to step in and take that starting role. Just the work ethic and that chip on my shoulder that I've kind of been overlooked is something that I hold on to and just go out there and do what I can do.

Q. For either of the two guards, you guys obviously just played against one of the biggest teams in the country in Washington State. You now match up against another team that's top 10 in the country and at average height, do you feel like having experience against a team that's so tall and long like Washington State so recently can give you such an advantage against Illinois?

KESHON GILBERT: I say yeah because we know what to expect. They kind of guard the same way as Washington State. We know we're going to be able to kind of force it in there. We have to play smarter, play off two feet.

Yeah, we know what to expect, so I feel like it's definitely a good thing.

THE MODERATOR: You guys can head back. Thank you.

Welcome, Coach, opening statement?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Great to see everybody today. Truly is an honor to be here. Extremely proud of the young men in our program for the continued hard work and how they represent our university every single day.

Excited for the challenge that's in front of us. Ready for any questions.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. We were talking with Tamin, and he spoke about the conversations with you, the build-up from year one to year two. How would you speak to this kid's character and the way that he's grown into this role as being a leader for this program, and what's stood out to you the most about that evolution?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, we're really fortunate. When Tamin came into our program, so often with freshmen, they have so many things to learn in terms of leadership. Tamin, because of his upbringing, because of his family foundation, so many great people in Ames, he has so many natural leadership characteristics that he brought in with him as a freshman. So we benefited from those so much in that first season.

Then as you look into year two and the things I really valued is when the season ended, I think Tamin took it really personal. His ability to shoot the basketball is something that some would have had him question. The work that he put in the gym and the time that he invested, the pride, you can see it now in the games. He's done the hard work, but there's also such a thing as your spirit and finding ways to just will shots in like he does based on your character and your hard work.

So he really committed to that. He knew that he would have to be more vocal, and I challenge him to this day about we want your personality to come out more. We don't want you to change. We want you to be the best version of yourself. It would be great if your teammates get to know more of that because you take advantage of more of those opportunities. That's something that we've continued to challenge him with.

I would say that the final piece is it's a big difference when you are going from somebody who is a freshman and some other guys are towards the top of the scouting report every single night, and you are one of the guys, it's a big step when you are going to be the guy or at the top of that. Knowing the responsibility that goes along with that on a daily basis, can't have a bad day, can't have a tough practice, can't have emotional reaction outbursts. You've got to be solution-oriented and always be driven to solve your problems immediately.

He's done such a great job of that. There's nobody that could be a better leader in terms of character, dependability, and work ethic on a daily basis than what Tamin Lipsey does for our program.

Q. How much of an impact do you think the defensive glass can play in the outcome of tomorrow night's game?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: There are so many elements that happen in a game. We're certainly a program that takes pride in what we call our daily habits, the things that we do every single day. Rebounding is a big part of that. As we start practice or do our workouts, our guys know how important it is. They know what the standards are. They know what the demands are, and they know the impact it has not just on success, but the overall mentality of the game.

There's so many mentality challenges that are going on throughout the course of a basketball game, and rebounding is one of those things that the team that usually benefits there is the more aggressive team.

For us we recognize the strength in our opponent, in how great they are going to the offensive boards. They go with force. They are one of the top teams in the country. They've got multiple guys. They've got great size, length, athleticism. So we recognize that strength of theirs. Yet, we feel like on a daily basis the things that we do prepare us for these type of opportunities and we're confident in that plan.

Q. You talked about Tamin's leadership and the example he sets. I know Coach Hurley was in here earlier talking about guys who are drama-free. I'm curious in this day and age with all the stuff that goes on with the portal and pre-portal and tampering, how valuable has it been for your program to have a leader like that who seems to be at least pretty drama-free?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, he doesn't get caught up in a whole lot of nonsense. He keeps his focus on what matters, what's important, what he can do and who he can be.

I don't know a whole lot about social media and all those things and what guys do in their free time, but if you are to see Tamin on a daily basis, you see a focused guy. You see a guy who has great maturity, mental makeup. Just stays in that space in that zone every single day.

Q. This defense that you guys boast, was the willingness from your guys always there to buy in to



that end of the floor and the culture you guys are developing defensively?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: We try to be very intentional and mindful in the recruiting process to look at young people that understand to develop, to play at your best, to be the best team you can be, that defending and showing unity on that side of the basketball is extremely important. Yet, everybody can talk about it. It takes the daily commitment every single day to guard the basketball, close out, block out, all these things that are so important to being good defensively.

We've been fortunate, our guys have developed a sense of pride in doing that. I really felt like earlier in the season our first home conference game we played a really good Houston team, maybe as good as any team in the country.

When you get a win like that, it was in the 50s, so you want to score more, you want to have more prolific offensive output. What happens is they say, well, this can be really good for us if we buy in and continue to buy in and stay the course defensively.

Ended up winning the game 57-53. You feel so great in the locker room after all those sacrifices, all that hard work, all that unity, all that time you beat the No. 2 ranked team in the country. I truly believe that gave our guys a greater sense of purpose and confidence. It's one thing to say buy-in, but they also need that validation that says the hard work is paying off, and that was a big night for us.

Q. Just some thoughts on Hason's evolution as a player and maturity and coming back from an injury he has really hit his stride late in the season.

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Hason at the conclusion of last season we had very direct communication. He had said to me that he wanted more. He wanted to earn more. He wanted to develop more. He wanted to take those steps.

I remember looking at him and saying, well, how hard are you going to work for it? What choices are you going to make on a daily basis so that those things happen because it's your choice to do those things. You see what he did in the weight room and the weight that he has gained. His confidence in terms of finishing, facilitating offense, and then defensively he's all over the place. Extremely disruptive, ball screen defense, post defense, on the glass, rim protection.

So Hason has given us a whole added dimension, especially here late in the season. You've seen over the last couple of weeks the threat that he poses as a lob threat at the rim, going to get a basketball up at 12 feet,

which not many guys can get to, the speed he plays with, the mental focus that he has brought to the table, and he's really elevated our team.

Q. You may have dealt with this at UNLV with being in the backyard of the world's largest sports books, but in light of what happened at Temple, how much is being done to mitigate the risk of point shaving throughout the sport?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: I think from our vantage point we try to educate the young men in our program and utilize the resources that we have available to make sure that they're mindful, that they know what decisions need to be made, what the conduct and the standards are at all times. We do everything we can. Our administration does a tremendous job bringing in people from the outside and trying to educate them.

So we'll continue, just like we do in all aspects for the young men in our program. We want to put them in position to be successful. We hold it as a high priority to do the right thing, and so for us we will continue to keep our focus there.

Q. I actually want to ask you about your fashion sense. Hopefully you don't decline this question. Can you tell me when and why you decided to go with polos and what the purpose of that was and if you ever hear anything from fans or people behind the bench who say, hey, what size is your shirt, Coach? Anything in that regard?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: I would say this, it's always interesting to me in coaching that I'm a guy that believes a lot in discipline, regiment, accountability, daily habits. It's always interesting when coaches demand that the players all wear the same thing and then the coaches all wear something different. It's always kind of stuck with me of what would I say to a player on the team if they say, well, why are all the coaches wearing different things and why are we wearing the same thing?

When we came to Iowa State, came back for the head coaching opportunity, it was important to me that how everybody dressed on a daily basis was exactly the same. So if you were to be at one of our practices, everybody, every manager, support staff member, coach, we all wear the same exact thing every single day. It's a shorts and T-shirt with our "Category Five Culture," with our saying on the back in practice.

I would say the same thing makes sense to me in a game setting of why wouldn't we all want to look -- our team and our coaching staff is in unity, and one way that we can

show that is through how we dress, through what we wear, and that we're all on the same page and we're all connected. For us we've taken a lot of pride in everybody doing that.

Now, if you specifically mean the size of my polo shirt, if that's really what we're getting at here, and you didn't really care a whole lot about the culture piece, I would say to you, we started at a bigger size. Now, when you have my frame and you are built more like a wrestler than a basketball coach, it can become challenging because I have short arms. If you wear this size polo, the arms are long and hang down past the elbows. If you wear this polo, it looks smaller. It gives me a greater sense of self-discipline each day that I have to fit into the one that our good friend Jeff Goodman would call a smedium and I wear that size and opt for that. It helps me stay as disciplined and accountable as I need to be to our program wearing that shirt.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

