

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

Thursday, March 28, 2024

Boston, Massachusetts, USA

TD Garden

Illinois Fighting Illini

Coach Brad Underwood

Coleman Hawkins

Marcus Domask

Luke Goode

Sweet 16 Postgame Media Conference

Illinois 72, Iowa State 69

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I thought that is what a Sweet 16 game would look like. It was pretty much what I expected. My hat's off to TJ and Iowa State. What an incredible year. When you face the No. 1 defense, you know they're not No.1 because they're soft or they lack effort.

I felt really good at half. We missed 102 free throws and some wide open shots and we were up 10. So I thought our defense was really, really good, but I also knew they would come out and punch and/or counterpunch; they did that. Unique night having Coleman in foul trouble and TJ in foul trouble.

I loved our resiliency playing through those moments especially without TJ on the court. We had a pretty long segment with actually TJ and Coleman out. We made plays when we had to down the stretch. We got a couple of stops when we had to.

I'm super excited and proud. We didn't come here to win one game. We came here to win two. To advance to the Elite Eight is special, and we have a great challenge. We'll dive into them sometime about 3:00 a.m. when we get back and be ready to go for UConn on Saturday. Excited.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Brad and Coleman, to win this game with defense,



doing it with grittiness like that, what did that mean given that, Brad, I think you been looking for that all year.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Well, we were really good early. We were quite literally struggling on the offensive end, and we flipped that script and had the No. 1 offense, and it became easy sometimes to outscore people.

We have a saying in our program that offense wins games, defense wins championships, and these guys are all mature, old, they've been through it and understood.

Tonight we did that, and we'll have to continue to do that to keep playing.

COLEMAN HAWKINS: The biggest thing is trying to maintain the same level of physicality. I felt like at times we were physical running them off screens, trying to lock in trail, and we saw when we got tangled up a few times, we had some personal fouls.

I think our biggest thing is maintaining that same level of intensity and physicality and then staying true to our principles and forcing tough twos. I think the game plan tonight worked for us forcing those tough twos and making shoot some tough shots.

Q. Brad, Terrence was out for I guess about six minutes there, comes back with five minutes left and immediately hits a three, has the steal late. What do you think especially for a guy -- when you can sit there you can get cold. What did you think of how he closed that game out for you?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: People who know Terrence know what a great, great competitor he is and how he loves to win. To do that cold shows he stayed in the game mentally. He was always cheering and excited in the time-outs and on the bench. He was dialed in mentally, and that's not an easy thing to do to, step in and bury a three. It was a big one.

I debated whether to put him in that early. I usually try to wait until the under four. You're in the Sweet 16, so you



got to roll with your dudes. And then the steal was great timing as well.

Q. This question is for Brad. Brad, when you have a player like Coleman getting it done on both ends of the floor, can you talk about the impact it does for the team?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Yeah, his versatility allows us to do so much. He made plays off the bounce tonight. We put him into our pistol action. I think he found Luke for a skip. It's matchup-based; when we really like that, they rotated a double at him. He has the ability to shoot threes.

I wish he would shoot more of them. Some a little closer to the line.

What he does on the defensive side is kind of the quarterback of our defense from back there. His intelligence, his toughness, his savvy, and then his versatility all have allowed him to have a great, great senior campaign.

Q. Question for Marcus and Luke. They keep on chipping away and get within two a couple of times. You hit a big and-one going into a time-out. You hit a big three as well. In those moments why does this Illinois team keep finding ways to counter and fight through it?

LUKE GOODE: I think it's what we've been through all season. We have a super mature team. I know coach talks about it all the time. When you get in situations like that, the guys that were on the court basically have seen it all.

Talk about Dain, it's his fourth year in college now, at Baylor and now second half year, so he knows what to expect. You got Coleman has had four years here. Marcus is a fifth year senior, and TJ is a fifth year senior. Myself who has been in college now for three years.

So when you have that level of maturity and sense of it's almost like you've been there before. You know how to perform in those situations. You know how to step up when the team needs you.

MARCUS DOMASK: Yeah, I think it's really easy during those runs for teams to kind of fall apart because they start trying to make home run plays and do their own thing.

I think our team, as Luke talked about, we're just a veteran team. When teams go on runs, I think we come together more than we do normally. I think we just stay together and we just trust what we do.

We work on stuff that we do every day and we just continue to do what we do every day, and eventually we just get our run back.

Q. Brad, when you hear that from these guys, I know NCAA Tournament, Sweet 16, there's nerve-racking moments, but do you find yourself with the veterans that you've got more comfortable in knowing that these are the guys that you have on the floor and that they can play through virtually anything?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: One-word answer: Yes. It's comforting to know that you don't -- you know what they're going to do, and they're going to execute and they're going to run their play and they're going to try to get the best shot or the best stop or whatever.

I've got tremendous amount of confidence in what these guys do.

Q. The prize for tonight's win is a meeting with UConn. As great as they've been over the past two years, is that a daunting task at all, intimidating in any way?

COLEMAN HAWKINS: I wouldn't say it's necessarily intimidating, but I think we have -- personally I have more of a respect for them. I think it's a higher level of respect.

I think they've been playing great all year. I think they're well-coached, and they do what they do.

As we learn more about them, I'll become much more familiar with them, but definitely have a higher level of respect for them and their culture and what they do.

MARCUS DOMASK: I agree. I have a lot of respect for them and what they've done. We've played a lot of college basketball. I've played a lot of teams that are supposed to beat us, if you say they're supposed to beat us. We'll figure out how to guard them and how to score on us, but they have to do the same for well. It's just another game for us really.

Q. When Terrence had to leave with 11:00 to go, you constantly said when he was out for six games, you were a top-10 national offense. Were you more worried offensively or defensively in losing him for those six minutes?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Both. I'll be honest, defensively. That's an elite defender that's not in the game. Gilbert got going. We went bigger. We had Coleman guarding more on the perimeter during that segment. Luke was guarding fours.

So it was a little bit of a different look, but I always feel like offensively we'll find ways to score and we did that. We had great spacing. Whether it was Luke's threes, whether it was an and-one or an offensive rebound, whether it was Dain a couple of times, we would find ways. I always get a little bit concerned about the defensive side when he's not in.

Q. Marcus, in the first half you were getting trapped pretty well there, but I saw you kept finding Terrence moving opposite ball. Is that something you worked on over the course of the season, or what brings that symmetry?

MARCUS DOMASK: I think we played teams that guard similar to them, so we knew what to expect. A lot of our offense tonight was just having them double me and then pass out of it and from there guys make plays. So we were just kind of really inviting the doubles because then you're playing advantage basketball on the back side.

Q. You talked about last time you guys had four games left. I saw Terrence when you guys won put up No. 3 with three games left. What's giving you guys that mindset that you can make that kind of run and get to where you've gotten?

LUKE GOODE: Yeah, it's the confidence in our teammates and the why-not-us mindset. We put in so much work in in the offseason and even back in Spain and practicing over the summer. This is what you prepare for. It's super exciting to have the opportunity to go play the No. 1 team in the country in the Elite Eight. You can't ask for anything better, honestly. It's a blessing for all of us to have that opportunity.

All the hard work we put in has kind of led us to this moment, and we're excited for it.

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