

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Illinois Fighting Illini

Brad Underwood

Tomislav Ivisic

Kylan Boswell

Postgame Press Conference

Illinois - 106, Iowa - 94

THE MODERATOR: We've been joined by the University of Illinois. Coach, we'll ask you to make an opening statement.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: If I could get some glass cleaner, it would be fabulous. Derek gave me his glasses, and it looks like a 4-year-old just got done eating peanut butter and jelly.

High-level basketball game. Didn't expect anything any different. I thought that Iowa's been playing exceptionally well. They've been in kind of postseason mode here for a few games. Their Michigan State game was exceptional. Obviously going to Lincoln and winning. Then surviving.

The one thing we didn't want was Payton to get going. I will mention this. So much respect for Payton. He stayed four years. I love seeing guys cry when it's over. That's invested. That's committed. That's dedicated. That's love for his university. That's love for his coaching staff.

That young man had just an unbelievable career. He had a terrific game today.

I thought these two guys to my right, Tommy got us off to an incredible start. I thought Bam controlled the second half. Tommy ends up with a double-double, six assists, one turnover, pretty good night.

We withstood. They hit some hard shots. I was frustrated early, but they were hitting a lot of mid-range pull-ups that I thought were really tough, and they really stress you. Both these guys were great, and I thought we got a great game out of Tre and Will. Both those guys on the wing are



playing really well right now.

Q. Tommy, what started you out here today -- shooting from threes, stepping to the free-throw line, just a great start for you this afternoon.

TOMISLAV IVISIC: It was great. First, that was the play we wanted to do. We played pick and pop, and I was wide open, and I had to shoot that ball. It went in. I feel like that opened the game for me and made other shots way easier.

Q. Tommy, I don't know if you've been watching more Jokic videos lately, but the passing from top of the key, what clicked with you running that kind of offense, and what you kind of added being that kind of guy?

TOMISLAV IVISIC: I don't know. I'm always looking for my teammates in those cuts whenever they're open. I feel like they recognize that if they're open and I see the space, I'm going to throw it, even if it's sometimes bad pass or turnover.

I feel like we're pretty used -- my teammates are pretty used to me throwing the ball there, and it's working pretty well now.

KYLAN BOSWELL: For me that's probably become a big part of just like my scoring is being able to give him the ball and just be able to cut. The majority of the time, I just know look up and the ball will be in the area where I can get in and go score.

Tommy's a terrific passer.

Q. Kylan, your confidence seems to be through the roof right now. When did it start clicking for you, particularly after that trip to New York?

KYLAN BOSWELL: After that game, after we got our butt kicked, for me I felt like I was just thinking too much when I was out there and for our team to win and be at our best, I need to help lead us and help be at my best personally.

I just had a little mental switch, put all the work I needed to



in the gym, and it's just been clicking on the court so far.

Q. Kylan, there was the technical came in the second half. You went to the line, and then a second technical came, and you stepped back, and you sent KJ to the line. What went into that decision?

KYLAN BOSWELL: During the timeout, I could tell KJ was thinking too much, he was frustrated. When you get to the line, you get four free throws and see the ball go in the rim. It helps any player get a rhythm. He was kind of going back and forth about it, and I just told him go shoot the free throws. "Go make all four of them." Went there, hit on all four and he was just in the right mode. Coming back on defense, he said thank you, and that was it.

Q. Tommy and Kylan, last four games you've won by 60 points. Other than health, what's the biggest difference between the team we saw tonight and the one that played Michigan State, Wisconsin, and Duke?

KYLAN BOSWELL: I'd say our confidence level. All of us have been just clicking with our chemistry, taking more pride on the defensive end, not letting anything make us fearful or any kind of situation.

I think all of us right now just in practice are trying our best to go as hard as we can, and I feel like it's just been translating onto the court.

Q. Tommy, your first taste of March basketball, playoff basketball, what did you kind of learn about it today? And knowing that it's win or go home.

TOMISLAV IVISIC: I don't know, it feels like every other game, if you lose you go home. If you win, you go next one. Hope that we can win it all.

Q. Kylan, when the pace of the scoring is as quick as it was tonight and as back and forth as it was at times, what does your mindset need to be?

KYLAN BOSWELL: We work on that in practice getting up and down. Each and every day he's having us push the ball in transition and try to get into our offense quickly. We want teams to do that because that's where we feel like we're at our best when we can push into transition and get into our offense quickly. That doesn't faze us.

Q. Obviously you're healthy. It's a big difference. Why do you think this team is (no microphone)?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: We had a heck of a game there. We had a heck of a game the first time. Obviously Tommy wasn't in the game. They were very good. We haven't

seen them in a little bit. It will be a different challenge than tonight. They've got great guards that really shoot it.

Obviously Queen and JuJu (Reese) are very, very good. So, yeah, it will be a different challenge, but our health is the big thing. We got in foul trouble in that first game. We had some pretty small guys trying to guard those guys in post-ups.

Q. I just wanted to get your assessment of Morez Johnson tonight and his 11 minutes.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I thought it was great. I was really concerned about him maybe overthinking things. We talked today and yesterday -- run, rebound, and defend. Run, rebound, and defend. Let's not get too complicated.

He has only had two days in practice with some of the defensive changes we've made. So I thought he was fantastic. He impacted the game. Kind of did what I wanted to do, which was just get his feet wet, and tomorrow may be a different story.

Q. Brad, Tommy's ability to space the floor and pass and find those cutters, how important is that to your offense?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: It is our offense. That's why we recruited this team. To have a 5 man who can shoot and to have one who can pass and then have positional size. Then you see Kylan's turned into a very, very good cutter. Tre White is. It's advantageous to have a guy like him.

You see somebody brought up Jokic, you see why Denver's so good. Really hard to guard that. He's just getting really back healthy and conditioning back. When he's shooting that basketball -- and he's probably our best shooter. When he's shooting the basketball like that, he's a hard guard.

Q. You mentioned Tre, one of the key components of that cutting offense. It seemed like he had a million points off cuts tonight. What's been the big change in him? Was it all just getting back from illness, this resurgence?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Yes. And I think it was -- it's so hard to explain without it sounding cliché or like an excuse. He felt awful for more than a week, ten days, and he missed games. It takes a minute to get back. You just don't get that back. All of a sudden, it's just really started clicking with him with the reps in practice.

He's one of the last ones in the gym every day. He's shooting the cover off of it in terms of practice. So I think



it's just finding the right energy to be able to do your work. It's paying off for him.

Q. Brad, you said you expected a high-level basketball game. Did you think we'd see one with 200 points and teams shoot a combined 46 from deep?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: That's always a possibility with Iowa. I think we're the two top scoring teams in the league. As these guys mentioned, we try to practice that way. We play 14-second shot clocks in practice most of the time. That fits us.

It was a little different than the first game, where we held them to a season low. But you know with Dix and you know with the two Sandforts that they are very, very capable of having one of those nights.

Unfortunately for us, we let them find some comfort early. I thought we were a little soft on the defensive side early.

Q. To follow up on that, it seemed like an old ABA Pacers game with the points being put up. Do you have concerns defensively?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: None. We've been guarding our tail off. We jumped a boatload of spots here.

Like I said, I felt great. Nobody shoots more midrange 2s than Iowa. I thought some were really well contested. You can't get any better guarded than the one right before the half. That's what really, really good players do. They make hard shots, and Payton made a boatload of them.

Q. Eight ties, ten lead changes in that first half, a bucket before halftime put you up four. Started the second half on a 12-7 run. Some of your thoughts as you're talking to your guys as halftime?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I didn't love him making that shot, to be honest, right before the half because then they have the ball right before the half. It's one of those unique positions where they get the ball twice before we touch it.

Again, you kind of -- we've been through it with Iowa for my eight years. Fran's teams are elite offensively. We've always had these type of dogfight games back and forth. I didn't expect anything else. And anything but that.

So it is what it is. It was a great game for the fans to watch. Fortunately, we came out on the right side of it today.

Q. Brad, what are you getting leadership-wise from Kylan and Tre, some of those older guys recently?

How has their voice changed?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: They've changed the whole dynamic of what our season looks like since the Duke game. It's showing off, it's my belief in them. It's helped every other player that's been through it. Kylan's made deep runs in postseason. His leadership, he's controlling a lot of the timeouts.

How many players take four points off the board? Kylan is an 85 percent free-throw shooter? How many players out there are going to say, hey, you need a little pick me up here, go make four free throws.

Now, KJ is also an 85 percent free-throw shooter, so you feel pretty good about that. Not many guys do that.

I think Kasparas is hurt, for Kylan being left off the all-defensive team was very genuine. I think it's the relationship those two have and the yin and yang they get going, but their leadership is huge.

Q. Coach, even without those four points, Kylan still set a new career high with 24, had 7 assists, 1 turnover. What did you like about him out there on the court and his confidence?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Yeah, it's nice to see him make 3s. When we recruited him, before he went to Arizona, I thought he was a terrific shooter. For whatever reason, it's been some tough shooting for him. That opens a lot of things up when he's making that, but his strength, Tommy's passing, they read each other great.

Then I thought that, even though Payton got going, I thought Kylan's defense was pretty darn good on him for most of the game.

Q. Do you have a feel for or a feeling about just how close this team is to like peak form? I mean, it's just like a four-game sample size. I don't know if that's enough for you.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I don't know. I think about that all the time. It's a great question. I think about what is that. I don't -- I think the shooting -- you know, we shot it better tonight. We've been shooting it pretty good. That's been the one thing. And we've cut our turnovers down a lot.

It seems like every game we've had one area that we've kind of just -- you know, last Iowa game we get outrebounded by them. I think we've had closer to getting to that ceiling where we're starting to play a little more 40 minutes than 35 or 32.

Yeah, I don't know, I think about that a lot, though. But I think we're headed in the right direction now that we're healthy.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports