

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 15, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Iowa State Cyclones

Coach T.J. Otzelberger

Tamin Lipsey

Keshon Gilbert

Postgame Press Conference



Iowa State - 76, Baylor - 62

T. J. OTZELBERGER: First, give a lot of credit to Coach Drew, the Baylor program, their players, their unbelievable program. Coach does a tremendous job. Their team is always so well prepared, and we knew tonight we were going to have to be at our best and do a great job dictating with our defense and scoring off our defense, and we know in the half court they're a great defensive team.

And so just really proud of our guys keeping the focus on doing that job against a really, really good Baylor team that's extremely well-coached.

Q. They had 13 turnovers. It's actually decent against you guys. What did you do to slow them down beyond that?

T. J. OTZELBERGER: I thought it was also -- the turnovers that were the live ball ones we were able to capitalize on were huge for us. Beyond that, our guys did a really good job, I think, connected defensively, making sure that we're in gaps when they -- especially when Dennis, he's so effective with the basketball.

I thought these guys did a terrific job guarding the basketball, but it also takes guys off the ball to be in those gaps. And I felt like we did a really good job of being in those gaps and having each other's back.

Q. You guys had one make from beyond the arc yesterday and you put up 10 today. What does that say about this group's kind of turnaround and offensive effort tonight?

T. J. OTZELBERGER: I think both days we ran really

effective offense. Our guys played for each other, they shared the ball. Whatever the shots are that come as a byproduct of that are the shots we're going to take. Tonight, obviously we got it rolling from 3 right away. Milan hits the first one and Tamin hits two right away. It starts to build our confidence shooting it from long range. But we don't hang on our hat on that one way or another. As long as we're moving the ball, playing for each other, if it means there's more baskets in the paint at the foul line from 3, we can win games in a lot of different ways. So we'll just take the shots and the opportunities when they present themselves.

Q. Tamin, before you enrolled at Iowa State, did you ever come down to this tournament as a fan? And secondly, what does it mean as an Ames guy to be reaching the title game?

TAMIN LIPSEY: Surprisingly, I was never able to make it down for a game but I was always watching it on TV. I grew up a Cyclone fan my whole life. Now doing it in my time, and it's still kind of surreal, but I'm here with my teammates just having a great time. We just take it one game at a time, and obviously we're now in the championship like you said, and there's so much excitement. The fans are totally behind us. Hilton South, that's what we call it. They bring so much energy and passion and it's just going to be a great atmosphere tomorrow.

Q. Houston has an amazing ability to go on spurts. What do you do to prevent that tomorrow?

T. J. OTZELBERGER: We have tremendous respect for Coach Sampson and their program. We know how great they are defensively, and like we try to do, turn their defense into offense.

We just need to keep our focus on the next play that's in front of us. We know you play really good teams, you're going to have adversity. We practice, prepare for adversity so that we can hit it head on, so we know that there's going to be things that happen that go their way. There's going to be things that go our way.



When something is not to go our way, it's really critical that we get on to that next play, whether that's getting a stop, making a play for a teammate, blocking out -- our guys have done a great job with that, and it's going to be really important tomorrow.

Q. Milan's shooting struggles have obviously been pretty well documented entering tonight, but he had one of his better shooting nights in about a month. What's the key to getting over a shooting slump that he had experienced here of late?

T. J. OTZELBERGER: I mean, more than anything, it's its teammates' belief in him. You see the shots that he's getting. These two guys, in particular, have stayed positive with them. They've continued to tell him to stay aggressive. They're looking for him.

There was back-to-back possessions late where Keshon went out of his way to get Milan a great shot. The next possession, Milan drives it, kicks it to Keshon and gets the drive and gets it to Hason.

It's the togetherness, it's our guys knowing -- they see it in practice every day. They have confidence in him. They know what he can do. So we'll continue to look for him and have him even be more aggressive because I still think today there are opportunities out there that he passed up that we would like him to take.

These guys are confident in him. I'm confident in him. He does the work. I'm excited to see what's in front of Milan the rest of the way.

Q. You talked earlier in the week about maybe wanting or needing a little better ball movement. I think you had 17 on 27 buckets tonight. Seemed like it was better. Obviously these guys took care of the ball. What have you seen tonight, maybe even last night that's picked up a little bit on that spot?

T. J. OTZELBERGER: I think our offense is a lot more physical. Our frontline guys are screening. They're very involved in the offense, which is important. These guys have great command of the game, whether it's a transition possession, whether it's running and executing something or after a play just continuing to move the ball, screen, play for one another. We've had a lot more poise playing later in possessions, not feeling rushed like we have to take a certain shots. I think all those things contributed. They've done the hard work. They care about one another. They love playing for each other. It's great to see the assist numbers high like that because of their hard work.

Keshon, do you have anything else to say?

KESHON GILBERT: Go Cylcones.

Q. Tamin, a lot of defense, basketball fundamental stuff. How does coach get you all to buy into that play style and mindset?

TAMIN LIPSEY: It really starts with the recruiting process and the guys we bring into this program, and just the standards that we have. We hold each other accountable. That's the biggest thing when it comes to the culture that we have. Just not wanting to let our brothers down. We go out there and fight for each other every game. We know they have our back. If we make a mistake, they're there for us. Just the connectedness that we built since summer. And that's how you win these late games. Once you get into March, it's going to come down to who is more of a connected group and who can come together when there's tough times.

We rely on each other, and it helps us win games.

Q. Keshon, you had a great night tonight statistically. But you do so much more for your team than what's on the stat sheet. For the last question of the night, tell us why you keep your focus on just making the right play at the right time offensively and defensively, because it really helps your team win.

KESHON GILBERT: That was a long question. (Laughter).

Say it one more time. How do I keep my focus? I say just wanting to win, wanting to make the right play and being in the right spots on defense. That's what it takes to win. That's what I try to do for the most part. Yeah, I just want to win.

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