

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 16, 2024

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Iowa State Cyclones

Coach T.J. Otzelberger

Tamin Lipsey

Keshon Gilbert

Milan Momcilovic

Postgame Press Conference

Iowa State - 69, Houston - 41

Q. What kicked in tonight, or even last night? Two of the best games of the season together. Why now? Why?

MILAN MOMCILOVIC: I think it started with the Kansas State game. We knew we didn't play our best. We knew we needed to change things in postseason play. We talked, and we needed to play our best in this tournament and going to the next tournament.

TAMIN LIPSEY: All the work we put in since the summer, all the time we spent together on and off the court, blending together just having fun on the court, off the court, you could see those moments come out in the games because we're just so connected and just have fun all the time. And obviously we played two great games back to back and are going to enjoy this moment a lot.

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Give our guys all the credit. Our last regular season game felt like we weren't as focused as we needed to be in a lot of aspects. It was great to have the opportunity to get back to the practice court where truthfully we didn't know who we'd be playing so that we could just focus on us especially offensively.

Our coaches did an amazing job in preparation, putting together things that we can do better and improve upon. These guys have worked extremely hard. They've trusted. They've done the hard work. They play for one another.

And we've been really good defensively throughout the course of the year, but to see us take the steps we have



offensively, it is truly special. And you hear it all the time. You want to be playing your best basketball this time of the year.

I don't think there's any question that that's exactly what we're doing. And credit to our great coaching staff and credit to these guys for all the hard work they do every day.

Q. Coach, you guys have been among the top teams in the conference over the course of the year, but was there a moment where you felt like this group was capable of going out and putting together a run like they just did?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: You know, credit, certainly, to Houston and their program because when we had the opportunity coming off of a loss early in league play, and they were coming in undefeated, it gave us a chance to be at our best to play a really good team.

We got off to a 14-0 lead. I felt like our guys kept great focus throughout that game. And when you beat a team or a program that's as good as Houston is, your guys know that they've accomplished something; that it takes a 40-minute effort. And when we had that win, it gave us the confidence to keep one day at a time moving forward.

We don't get ahead of ourselves. We just focus on the work the next day. But I do think that game gave us confidence that all the hard work we're doing and everything was paying off for us. Now we just need to stay the course each and every day.

Q. What was your plan of attack for their ball screen defense?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: They're so good. There's not a team in the country that's better at getting to the point of the screen and being aggressive with their hands and really trying to put you on your heels.

We talked a lot about we need to have quick, simple ball movement, not try to necessarily attack it as much as draw both defenders and then get the ball and move and play for one another, be ready to attack closeouts, be ready to look

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at guys rolling, cutting to the rim. Try to have as many random screens and ball screens mixed in so they don't see it coming as much.

Our guys did a great job executing that. So smart. So skilled. So mentally tough because it's easy to have a plan, but as gifted as their team is and as connected as they are and as well-coached as they are, there's not many nights where teams shoot 50 percent from the field and assist-to-turnovers almost 2-to-1.

Credit to these guys for their connectedness and being in unity to play together.

Q. Your first three years have been filled with a lot of success, three tournaments, a Sweet 16, but does this moment of winning a Big 12 title maybe continue to prove that the philosophy you've built this program with is working at a really high level?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, I mean, we believe in what we're doing. We believe in getting high-character young men who want to do the hard work, who want to develop and continue to better themselves in all aspects.

And we really believe in that model and that formula. We believe in these guys are student-athletes too. We value their education as much as important as the basketball piece is. That's really important to me as well.

And we're not going to deviate or change how we do things. Hopefully for these guys it validates the hard work they're doing every single day, because what's important to me is that as much as we do want to win every game, that they're built for success for the rest of their life, in whatever they choose to do.

As college graduates, as husbands, fathers, community members, what really matters to me is these guys have the ability to choose whatever they want to be successful in moving forward. And the wins in a setting like this especially are icing on the cake, but they're not the main thing. The main thing is these guys become the best version of themselves.

Q. Milan, walk us through that step-back 3 in the corner, what you were feeling. Tamin, you had quite the move in 3-pointers as well?

MILAN MOMCILOVIC: I think he was running at me with a long closeout. I passed down the shot, and then I think he kind of fell a little bit, turned around got that step-back in the corner, created separation, and just knocked it down.

TAMIN LIPSEY: I think it was also on one closeout we

were coming in on offense, just trying to attack, get them on their heels. Ripped right, got them off balance a little bit, was able to step back as well and just knock it in with confidence.

Q. Keshon, how would you summarize the step by step your team took to get to this championship game and saving the best for last in this championship game?

KESHON GILBERT: Ask me one more time? My bad.

Q. Summarize the step by step you took in this tournament to saving the best for last in this championship game?

KESHON GILBERT: I would say it started with the loss at K-State. That kind of put us in the mindset like, yeah, we can be beat, and it humbled us a little bit. We went back to practice, got to work, got back to doing what we do every day. It ended up paying off in the end.

Q. What kind of message did you guys send tonight to the nation?

TAMIN LIPSEY: To be honest, however they want to perceive it. We really don't care what the outside world thinks of us. That's why we're such a close group.

We just put our head down and go to work. And that's why I don't think there's anyone else more deserving than our team to be in this position and celebrate this moment. We've been working since June, and just having a lot of fun, but it's a lot of hard work, and the outside world can take whatever from this game and think whatever they want, but at the end of the day we're just going to get right back to work.

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