

Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Kansas City, Missouri, USA

T-Mobile Center

Iowa State Cyclones

Coach T.J. Otzelberger

Curtis Jones

Milan Momcilovic

Postgame Press Conference



BYU 96, Iowa State 92

THE MODERATOR: Joining us on the dais is Iowa State Head Coach T.J. Otzelberger, along with Curtis Jones and Milan Momcilovic. Coach?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, so much respect for BYU and their program, their coaching staff. Again, we just battled these guys however many days ago and we knew how tough they were. We know how much they play for one another and what a challenge it would be for us today.

Our guys came out with an unbelievable spirit. Program pride, toughness, you know, certainly there's always things you can do better, but yet at the same time feel like our guys really left it out on the court.

Wanted to come out with a win; highly competitive to come out with a win; proud of our guys for their fight.

Q. T.J., how do you feel like your ball pressure and turnover creation adapted without Keshon and Tamin in the lineup?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: We practice in a way where we don't lower our standards based on who maybe out there. We have confidence in our guys to go out there and do that.

You can look at the turnover numbers and say we only turned them over ten times. That's below what we needed to do to be successful, but our guys were competitive on the basketball and did everything they could to keep the ball in front and have collisions and be intentional guarding.

Again, regardless of who plays, the standard is the

standard, and I know our guys can uphold that standard.

Q. Coach, last game against BYU nobody could score in the first half. It was like 33-24. This game both teams scored over 90. What was the reason for the different feel and different style of play in this game?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: I think the familiarity with one another in ways that you could be effective offensively and attack and the pace of the game got going up and down. It felt like a half-court physical game for a large stretch of that first half at our place and they got out in transition. We didn't do as good of a job.

Today really felt like both teams played with that freedom and confidence in the open court and the basketball moved and guys made big plays and big shots. I think it was really two really good teams with a lot of competitive spirit throwing punches back and forth.

Q. Curtis, that stretch you went on where you were making everything is that just about the best you can ever remember shooting the basketball in the game?

CURTIS JONES: Yeah, what they told me what it was, I thought that was pretty crazy. I felt like I couldn't miss at the time, so whatever I put up it just was going in. It's definitely one of the ones to remember for sure, one of the good stretches.

Q. Coach, obviously with Key and Tamin not playing you got to see more of Cade and others. What was it like seeing Cade play and finally get one to go in?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Cade every day after we finish our team meal comes back to the gym and gets additional shots. That's after he gets workout early in the day and practice. He really cares about his teammates. He really cares about our program. He's obviously earned my trust over what he does every single day.

So when he comes out in a big environment and a big game and knocks down a shot like that, you know, that's a credit to him, his character, and his work ethic. We see him do it on a daily basis.

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We know what he can continue to do, and I'm excited about his continued development because he's giving us a good spark and some great energy.

Q. Coach, we saw Tamin go through warm-ups before the game. What went into the decision not to play him?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: I'm not sure there's ever been a guy that I've been around or heard of that has probably played through more injuries and things than what Tamin has done in the past.

We don't take for granted what he lays on the line and what he puts on the line for his teammates and our program every single day.

I've never been in an experience with him up to this point where he doesn't just say, I'm fine, I can go. When we talked before the game I could see the hesitancy with him and how he felt when he warmed up.

He gave it every opportunity that he could. But, you know, coming off the injury yesterday and not being able to move great today, we just decided it wasn't best for him to go out there.

We don't want to risk any further injury. And, again, it's more of a credit to Tamin that he warmed up. He went out there, he was doing everything he could all night last night, all morning to be ready to play. Just wasn't in his best interest to give it a shot today.

Q. T.J. what is the process for Tamin and Key to try to be able to play next week? Are you hopeful for both or one of them to play?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Those guys have been phenomenal competitors for us over the time so now the competition comes in the training room, the rehab, everything that you do and how much you put into, you know, getting your body healthy and doing what you need to do to be out there.

So certainly have to be mindful of that, evaluate it day by day, and just see where we're at.

I know that, again, they'll both get the treatment that they need, they will both put the time in that they need and I'm optimistic about what that means for us moving forward this season.

Q. For T.J. and Curtis, you opened your statement talking about the amount of pride that they played with

the toughness that they played with. How important is that to have that at this time of the year entering the NCAA Tournament, and same for Curtis?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: It's extremely important that you lay it on the line, that you play for your teammates, that your pride shows up.

We've had ups and downs this season. We've had some great moments and we've had ones that we could have been better. When you have those experiences it brings you closer together, and I feel like our group right now there is a camaraderie, there is a bond, a connection and they want to play for one another.

This time of the year special things can happen when you maintain that commitment and that focus to doing what you need to do.

Again, we want to get our guys healthy but I'm also excited to get back to the practice court because I'm confident our best is still in front of us and I'm eager to get back to work to bring out our best.

CURTIS JONES: I agree, and even more so now that we're going into the tournament, NCAA Tournament. It's win or go home, so gotta put everything out there, you know, because we ain't trying to go home.

Q. T.J., what are your major takeaways as you turn the page toward the NCAA Tournament?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: I was pleased yesterday with how we played. Thought our guys came out and did a great job. Cincinnati's got a good team and I felt like we physically imposed our will on that game the way we need to do to be successful.

I thought we fought today. Of course when you give up 96 there are things defensively, guarding the three-point line, rotation defense, things we could have done better, but I feel like our team is coming.

There are certainly things that we've got to sort through and there is opportunity in front of us on the practice court, but I'm pleased with where we're at right now and I'm excited for what's in front of us.

So like I said before, eager to get back to the practice court. I think some of the things that we've seen here give us more mojo as we move forward to play great.

Q. Milan, these last couple games do you think you've been getting downhill to the rim making plays down there more? Do you feel like you've found something

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here in the last couple of games?

MILAN MOMCILOVIC: Definitely I feel like I've been working more down low and downhill. I think teams are just flying at me now, so going to the basket is a great option. I feel like I've been finishing well.

Q. Coach, first half you get 53 points. What did you think of BYU's second half defensive effort and what they were able to do?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, no, they're a good defensive team. Their guards are physical. They do a great job of defending without fouling. I think that was important for them. We didn't get to the foul line very often. The energy that Keita plays with on the interior is tremendous.

So they're a great team. They have great depth so they're able to play ten guys and keep fresh bodies out there.

So I think all that played into it, but they had a great focus the second half and ramped up their defense and got stops when they needed to.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you very much.

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