

GEICO Players Era Men's Championship

Tuesday, November 25, 2025

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

MGM Grand Garden Arena

Iowa State Cyclones

Coach T.J. Otzelberger

Nate Heise

Joshua Jefferson

Postgame Press Conference

Iowa State 78, Creighton 60

Q. For Coach, what do you normally get Coach McDermott for his birthday, and is this the worst birthday gift you have ever given him?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Coach McDermott has done so much for me. 2006, gave me this opportunity at Iowa State that I certainly hadn't earned yet by what was on my resume and what we'd accomplished, and he took a chance on me and had a belief in me. The level of gratitude and thankfulness I will always have to him for this opportunity, I couldn't be more grateful.

So unfortunate when you're playing somebody that you care about as much as I care about him and that means as much to you, but we knew coming in today somebody was going to come out on each side of it. And just proud of our guys that we made enough plays to be successful.

Q. T.J., when did you know that Tamin wasn't going to play today, and is there a chance he suits up tomorrow?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: No idea on tomorrow. I would say today the decision was made this morning, just wanted to give it as much time as we could to see. And Tamin certainly knows his body better than the rest of us.

We'll continue to evaluate it. We're going to stay with the day-to-day and then work with him and our training staff.

But I don't want him to feel any additional pressure. As much as we're competitive and want to win every game, Tamin has done so much for our program, we want him to



be healthy. We want his body to feel great, and we want him to be at his best. And we'll be disciplined until that time comes.

Q. Sort of a jumping-off point from that, what did you think about the way Nate and Killyan stepped up in Tamin's absence?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Nate and Killyan both played terrific. First with Nate, just the toughness he brings to everything and the competitiveness he brings to everything. You can feel it every possession. Defensively, the communication, the impact he has, guarding the ball, making plays, communicating offensively, made so many plays cutting, great assists for his teammates, decision-making.

He's a warrior, and that was on full display today for 38 minutes and 37 seconds of game time, right? So he didn't have a lot of rest, either. He was terrific.

And, look, for Killyan, he's been so fortunate to have a guy like Tamin Lipsey right alongside him, where we have two true point guards out there. And Tamin, there's not a better human being, character player, winner to set the tone and show you how to do things.

And today, Killyan out there showed everything that he's learned from Tamin and put that into play. And I think there's no better way to honor someone you respect as much I know as he honors him than to go out there and have that performance. So it was great to see.

Q. T.J., two things. How have you felt about your defense so far? And when your team gets a shot clock violation, how does that make you feel?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Defensively, we have a lot of respect for Creighton and their offensive team, Coach McDermott, and they're really good that way. And our guys came out and early in the game we were stringing together stops and we had some of those shot clock violations.

And those are huge momentum plays. They give you tremendous confidence. Certainly the live ball turnovers and steals give you a chance to go in transition at advantage, but when you have a shot clock violation, you just kind of feel like you're breaking your opponents' spirit. And our guys did a great job of doing that.



And, look, I think defensively overall there's things we're continuing to get better at. There's things we're continuing to work on. And I think our guys understand the identity when we play our best, it's focusing on getting our defense set and pressuring the basketball. And we're getting better at that each day. So we'll continue to keep our focus on our work habits.

Q. Nate, what's it like playing a game with Tamin on the floor versus not?

NATE HEISE: Yeah, like Coach said, Killyan did a great job of stepping up and taking Tamin's role. As long as someone is out there to run the true point guard position, it feels... obviously it's a big absence, but the way Killyan played today was great.

And we wish nothing but the best for Tamin, but we're going to keep going regardless of if he plays or not.

Q. And for Joshua, big-picture, without even knowing who you're going to face tomorrow, what things have you seen over the past three or four weeks as the season's gotten going that's given you guys a lot of confidence to know that you guys can maintain that status as one of the 10, 15 best programs in the sport?

JOSHUA JEFFERSON: I think it's our practice habits and our leadership. I think we have three really good leaders in myself, Nate, and Tamin. So just pushing practice habits forward and trying to never take a day off is what's helping us play well in these games. So just continue to practice well and play harder.

Q. T.J., when you first met Killyan, did he have that innate sense of playing with maximum effort right away, or was that further bolstered by being around Tamin?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Killyan has tremendous basketball character, will, toughness, grit. He brought that to the table, and that's what attracted us to him.

The first time he was brought to our attention probably two and a half years ago when you saw on film from a camp in Europe, just picking up full court, the pride he takes defensively. And it gives your team great energy, and it's something that really impacts winning.

And he had that coming in. We were fortunate, but I also think there's a level of discipline and daily work that a guy like Tamin does that Killyan can come in as a freshman and see what that looks like, when you have an example that you can have that visual picture every day. So Killyan

has done his part to continue to elevate himself.

Q. For Joshua, when you were growing up or younger, did you have a point guard background? How have you developed that play-making sense throughout the years?

JOSHUA JEFFERSON: My AAU coach from my youth, Dedan Thomas, he used to train me like a guard. In the program he used to never treat the bigs like bigs. He always had me doing the guard drills.

So that's how it's grown over the years. So it's continued to stick with that work as I got older and I left him. So big props to him for what he did for me in my youth.

Q. For Joshua, you had a double-double in the exhibition game against Creighton last month. Another double-double today. Do you see it as just a happy coincidence, or do you think your skill set gives you like a big advantage when you face off against the Bluejays?

JOSHUA JEFFERSON: I think it's my intention. When I'm intentional about what I do on the floor, I think I can go out there and do what I want to do every single night. So crashing the boards, trying to get on offensive glass as much as I can is what helped me with my double-double tonight.

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