

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - South Dakota State vs Iowa State

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

CHI Health Center

Iowa State Cyclones
Coach T.J. Otzelberger

Tamin Lipsey

Keshon Gilbert

Robert Jones

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have Iowa State University Cyclones with us. On the dias we have Tamin Lipsey, Keshon Gilbert, Robert Jones. We'll go right to questions.

Q. Tamin, question for you. Being from Ames and coming to this tournament and watching these guys like Monte play growing up and now you being that guy, what's it like?

TAMIN LIPSEY: It's amazing. I kind of just take a moment to soak it all in and enjoy the moment with my teammates and coaches. Just understanding how big of an accomplishment it is to just get here and then understand that we're trying to do more than just get here really, so...

Q. You won Big 12's Most Outstanding Player in the tournament. What was working for you so well in those three games?

KESHON GILBERT: I would say just making the right play at the end of the day. My teammates have entrusted me, us playing for each other, and just us feeding off of our defense.

Q. For any of you guys, Coach Otzelberger has done a great job of bringing in transfers every year, and you guys gel so well. How does that happen, and how are you able to gel on the court and have the success you have with new guys each year?



ROBERT JONES: Yeah, it's a credit to him and the coaching staff. He recruits great guys and great characters. This is a bunch of guys on this team this year that want to gel with each other. The togetherness is a huge part of the team this year, and it's one of our staples of the program.

Probably just a credit to him and who he brings in, and then just the credit to all the people that are on the team just being great character guys who want to gel together.

Q. Defense may not be quite as flashy as some teams that score 90 points a game, but what defense done for you this particular season?

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with Tamin, go down the line.

TAMIN LIPSEY: Defense is our number one focus on the court. Obviously we translate that into our offense. That helps us to score with fastbreak points and things like that.

Just taking pride in our defense and knowing that not all teams like to play defense. But we're one of those teams that enjoys it, and we like to get after people and make it harder for them.

KESHON GILBERT: Kind of building off what he said, just taking pride in it, knowing we can win on the offensive end and defensive end. It's a great thing that we have. He said most of it.

ROBERT JONES: I like to quote the best that says, "Defense wins championships." I like that because even on a night where the ball is not falling for you on the offensive end, as long as you can continue to get stops on the defensive end, you'll end up winning the game. Because if they can't score, you'll win the game because eventually you'll make a shot.

Q. For either of you two guards, when you think back to the beginning of the season to where you guys are at now, how much have the two of you together kind of evolved your games to play off of each other effectively?

THE MODERATOR: Keshon, start us off.



KESHON GILBERT: I feel like both of us are pretty unselfish guards. We want to see our teammates eat. We want to eat it ourselves. Feeding off each other, that's easy because I like to see him make shots. He likes to see me make shots. It just gelled pretty good.

TAMIN LIPSEY: Yeah, I would say we just spend a lot of time together. We were roommates in the summer for a short period of time. Just bonding at the start and just learning off of each other and helping each other when we're on and off the court. Just learning the other person's game has gone well throughout the year.

And now that we're in postseason, we're locked in and we know each other's ins and outs and that helps us win games.

Q. The phrase "under the radar" is sometimes overused, but I feel like in some cases you guys are. How well do you think people know you, and how much of a name do you think you can make for Iowa State over the next month?

THE MODERATOR: Robert, you're first and then to Keshon next.

ROBERT JONES: We like the term "under the radar" here. We like to be the underdogs. We like to be the team that people doubt just because we like to prove people wrong.

We like to get after anybody who is put in front of us, and it doesn't matter what the name says on their jersey. We're going to bring physicality. We're going to bring that toughness to the game that a lot of people haven't seen.

KESHON GILBERT: Can you repeat that question?

Q. Under the radar is overused, but it does feel like it's true for your team. What kind of name do you think you can make for Iowa State over the next month?

KESHON GILBERT: I just feel like we could prove to everybody that we can pretty much compete with anybody in the country, and I really wouldn't say it's proving people wrong. I would say it's proving our habits and our work that we put in right.

THE MODERATOR: Anything else for the Cyclones? Gentlemen, thank you very much for your time.

As advertised the head coach of the Iowa State University Cyclones is with us. We're going to ask for a comment from the coach and then go to questions. Coach.

T.J. OTZELBERGER: It's certainly great to be here in Omaha. Just an awesome city, awesome venue and place to play.

As far as our team goes, we have a terrific group of young men. Really proud of the hard work they do and the daily habits that they've built throughout the course of the season.

They're a group that is really together and connected. And you get to this time of the year, and you want to focus on what's in front of you, and we'll certainly do that. But more than even any of the games, I'm proud of the young men in our program and how they represent our university.

Q. Would it be fair to say nobody knows -- as a 2 against a 15, nobody knows more about how dangerous South Dakota State can be than you because you coached there.

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, they're a very well-coached team. Coach Henderson, their staff did an unbelievable job. They've won eight games in a row. They're a team that can really space the floor. They've got veteran guards and guys who have been there. They have tremendous pride in their program.

They're a group that has played, as I mentioned, their best basketball of late, and you know that the young men in their locker room chose to go there because they wanted to win. They were competitors. That's why they picked to go there.

We are very aware of what a great team they are, how well-coached they are. That's something that certainly doesn't -- having the experience I had there, it's certainly something that you're well aware of.

Q. Obviously the calling card for you guys this season has been defense, second in the nation in turnovers. When you think back to maybe even your first year at SDSU and even the struggles you had defensively, this is a two-parter, why is your team this year so good, defensively? And as a coach how have you developed your philosophy to make your players play the best defense possible?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Our team has done well defensively because when they came in in June, they were very coachable, they were very receptive to how hard you need to play, how committed you need to be if you want to be successful. They're very connected so that when something doesn't go our way, somebody else makes up for it. They've got each other's back.



They take a tremendous pride on generating turnovers and turning that into offense for our team. It's a credit to their character. It's a credit to their effort, and it's a credit to their connectedness, because we make mistakes and guys have each other's back and cover up.

The second part of your question in terms of evolving your coaching philosophy, for me, very fortunate we came in with the Jackrabbits at South Dakota State, Coach Nagy had done a terrific job building habits. We were fortunate to have Mike Daum, who was one of the truly elite frontline players in all of college basketball.

As we evaluated the program and the great job Coach Nagy had done before, it was important to lean into the strengths that Mike had and to cultivate an offense that allowed him to be at his very best. So we continued to try to do that while we improved our defense.

At Iowa State when we came in at the onset, it was important that we develop our defense and then cultivate our offense and move it forward with that. What you have seen is a group of guys who do the effort-based things, who embrace the hard work, who love the daily habits. And we're continuing to move forward offensively and fortunate that, it felt like last weekend, Thursday was our best game of the year and then Friday was our best game of the year and then Saturday was our best game of the year.

The young men in our program are playing for one another, and we're going to continue to lean into those strengths on both sides of the basketball as we move our program forward.

Q. T.J., what was your reaction when you found out who you were playing? Was there a sense of, hey, this will be fun, I'll get to see some old friends? Was there a little bit of, oh, boy, now I have to answer a bunch of questions about playing South Dakota State?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: I knew I would get to see you, Zim, which is a highlight for me. At the end of the day tremendous gratitude and thankfulness to Justin Sell and the opportunity he gave for my family and I to lead the Jackrabbits program.

Eric Henderson has been one of my best friends on earth for 20-plus years. I had an opportunity to coach Bryan Petersen at Iowa State and recruit him there and have tremendous confidence and belief in him.

There's a lot of people that we really care about. There's a lot of gratitude and thankfulness that we have. At the same time, the group that we have and what we've

invested in our team, they're focused. We have a focus on the opportunity that's in front of us. At 6:35 p.m. tomorrow we're going to aim to be at our very best.

Certainly appreciative of the experiences and a lot of great friends, but fortunate to be coaching a group that has the focus and determination that our group does to be ready to be at our best tomorrow night.

Q. In your time here at Iowa State, you've done a great job of bringing in transfers and getting them to gel and play pretty quickly and have success doing that. What's the secret formula how you've been able to do that with a lot of guys that haven't seen each other until each year playing with each other?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Our coaching staff does a phenomenal job evaluating the character of the young people that we bring into our program. It's really important to me that everybody understands on the way in what the standards, the discipline, accountability will be on a daily basis and that they will be held to that every single day.

Our program is not for everybody. We're not a program that as the transfer portal opens, there's not 10 and 20 and hundreds of guys that we look at. We're very specific in the work habits we look for. We look for young people that have handled adversity well. We look for young people that really want to develop each and every day.

I think when you bring in the right people and you hold them to the standards and then they hear from those that have been here that it works because it worked the year before and it's going to work the next year, now you start to have young men in your program who are helping lead that cause and that charge.

We've just been fortunate to evaluate the character and the work habits of the guys that we bring in, and we'll continue to be very mindful of that. We're not a program that sells a whole lot of fake dreams or makes promises. It's more about do the hard work, show up every day, be a great teammate, put yourself in this process, and challenge yourself to be your best in all areas every day. And we'll continue to find those guys that want to be part of it and be successful with them.

Q. I wanted to ask you about two mentors you worked for. They're both in the NCAA Tournament. Fred Hoiberg and Greg McDermott, what you learned from them. I don't think you coached him, but Baylor Scheierman is somebody you recruited to SDSU. Five years later has he become the player that you thought he was going to become when you recruited him?



T.J. OTZELBERGER: First with Greg, a lot of gratitude to Coach McDermott. He had recruited me out of high school, was the first coach that recruited me my sophomore year of high school. And fortunately he probably had somebody on his staff that told him better so that he didn't make the recruiting mistake and bring me to play for him at Wayne State.

Greg has meant a lot to me. He gave me a lot of opportunities. I worked his camps when he was at Northern Iowa. He has continued to be a close friend and somebody that believed in me and gave me a chance to come be an assistant at Iowa State far before my résumé ever warranted an opportunity as such. So very grateful to him.

In terms of Coach Hoiberg, we were just texting even yesterday. Again, Fred is an extremely intelligent, offensive basketball-minded guy. A guy that is very cerebral. Gets his teams to play with purpose, share the basketball, play for one another. So learned a tremendous amount, and we're still close friends today as well.

Both of those guys mean a great deal to me, and I'm very appreciative to them for what I learned and then also for them giving me the opportunities as a coach to grow and continue to develop.

With Baylor, certainly saw something special in him. His ability to pass the basketball and competitive spirit are really at a high level. Yet, at the same time, I'll give Coach Henderson a lot of the credit. He did the majority of the legwork recruiting him, identifying him, and evaluating his abilities.

Certainly we were excited to have him be able to come play for us. Would have loved the chance to coach him, and proud of him on how he's continued to work and all the successes that he has had because I know he's dedicated himself, and he's really worked for it.

Q. Matt Mims is kind of the last hold-over here from the guys that you recruited to play at South Dakota State. Will there be a big smile on your face tomorrow when you see him take the floor tomorrow and see him get his chance?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: I'm really proud of Matt. That first year he came in and redshirted for us, and we knew he was an energy-giver. As a point guard or a lead guard, he's one of those guys that makes everybody around him better, and he just knows how the game is supposed to go. He's a terrific competitor. He's a phenomenal young man.

It was an honor watching him pour into his teammates

every day to be there on that journey with him, and then for him to continue to have this experience and to go out having this opportunity his last season. Really happy for him.

Q. Question about the fan environment that you expect. I know one of the phrases that's been thrown around is "Hilton West," and I know the Cyclone fan presence was huge down in Kansas City. Can you just talk about the impact that that has and what you expect from the Cyclones faithful?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: It's truly amazing. To be a Cyclone every day is really humbling because you know that the passion, enthusiasm, investment that our fans make every single day, it's inspiring. It elevates our team to play at higher levels. To be able to play at Hilton Coliseum, the truly best home court atmosphere in all of college basketball, with such passionate fans allows our guys to accomplish things that they're able to do because of that enthusiasm, that passion, that spirit.

To have our fans show up for us in Kansas City the way that they did last weekend was something I'll never forget. The term "Hilton South" almost cheats what an amazing atmosphere and how much our fans showed up for us and how thankful we were each and every single night. And that last night was phenomenal.

We know that they really care. We know that we've got a special team. We know that's been a winning combination for us this year when we've had our fans behind us, our guys at their best. So excited. Whether the term is "Hilton West," I don't know. But what I do know is really fortunate to have the best fans in all the country and going to be excited tomorrow night to come out and see the support that we have behind us.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

