

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

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

CHI Health Center

Iowa State Cyclones

T.J. Otzelberger

Curtis Jones

Milan Momcilovic

Media Conference

Iowa State 82, South Dakota State 65

THE MODERATOR: The Cyclones are with us. Head Coach T.J. Otzelberger is with us and also Curtis Jones and Milan Momcilovic to represent the student body. We're going to ask T.J. to start off with a statement on this game and go to questions for all three participants.

T.J. OTZELBERGER: First of all, hats off to the Jackrabbits. Coach Henderson, to their team, to their players across the board.

They have a tremendous program. They're very well coached, very well prepared. They did some really great things from a -- excuse me. My voice is shot -- from a scheme standpoint to spread us out.

Just can't say enough about the great job that they did, how well prepared they were.

As far as things go for us, we start fast. We come out of the box and play off our defense. We pressured the ball. We did that to start the game. We did that in the second half to start the half. That's who we are, and that's who we'll continue to be.

When we do that, we play at a really high level. I'm proud of how our guys shared the basketball. They're playing for one another, which is important. So overall fortunate to come out with the win against a very good Jackrabbit team.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.



Q. Question for you, Coach. Obviously awesome to get a win in the tournament. Is there any sense of, I guess, bittersweet feeling doing it against a great friend?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, I didn't like the matchup when it came out. Didn't want to play against those guys. I care about a lot of people on their side and dear friends. So, yeah, I mean, there's that part of it that you don't love that.

At the same time proud of our guys. They've done the hard work. They've worked for it. They've worked for this opportunity. We don't get to control who we play. We just need to be prepared and ready to rise to that challenge.

I was proud of our guys for the job they did with that here tonight.

Q. This is for anybody. Just talk a little bit about the support you got from the crowd tonight. They talked about it being Hilton West. It certainly seemed to be that especially in the first five minutes.

THE MODERATOR: Milan to you, and then Curtis will jump in.

MILAN MOMCILOVIC: The crowd was great for us. It was great for us last week in Kansas City, and they brought it again tonight. They're going to keep bringing it.

It helps us win games, honestly. It helps us with momentum, and we love the fans.

CURTIS JONES: Yeah, I agree with Milan. The crowd is great. They give us energy when we need stops or when we're on a run. We can hear them. Even before the game, they're super loud. I feel like that gives us energy going into the game as well.

Q. This is for you, Coach. Hason has really come along here in the last couple of days and weeks, I guess, on the offensive end. How much has his presence and ability to play above the rim help you guys in transition and in the half-court?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: It's helped immensely. He's



... when all is said, we're done.®



certainly had as big an impact on that game right when he came in as anybody did when they started their run.

You know, those lobs and the way he can go get them at 11.5, 12 feet and our guys look for him is special. It's definitely given us an added dimension offensively in the flow and transition, as well as in the half-court.

You know when he screens and he is getting behind the defense, it's not easy for a guard or others to try to help because he's just -- he can go get it so high up in the air. It has really helped us and given us a whole new dynamic offensively.

Q. This could be for all three of you guys, but they started the second half with a 5-2 scoring run to cut their deficit to four points, and then you rattled off a 17-3 run after that. What made the difference for you guys during that stretch where you really took control of the game?

CURTIS JONES: I think we do a great job of not panicking when teams get close and make runs. It's been a lot of season now. I feel like we've been in that situation a lot of times, and, you know, it's the NCAA Tournament now. Even in the Big 12 every team is good. So you know they're not just going to go away.

We focus on what we do every day. We believe we'll make a run just like they did.

MILAN MOMCILOVIC: We really just need to find ourselves there, find ourselves on the defensive end, get stops, and then we got some easy transition buckets, which really helped us.

Then the ball was moving on the offensive end and got some good shots.

Q. T.J., this tournament obviously gets so much attention for its big upsets. Did you have a conversation with your guys at all during the week or even today just about being wary of that, not wanting to be one of those teams to go down to a high seed?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, we don't talk a whole lot about things like that. We focus on our daily habits, the things we do in practice every day, and we know if we keep our focus there and play our best, that things will work themselves out.

We're very focused on what's in front of us. Certainly have a lot of respect for the Jackrabbit program and Coach Henderson. Yet, at the same time our guys have done a great job of focusing on the things that we work on every

single day and worrying about only what we can control and not the things that we can't.

Q. This is for Curtis. Curtis, you guys had a lot to celebrate last Sunday, and how much coming out of the gate in the manner in which you did was that a reflection of the reset over the last several days since Sunday?

CURTIS JONES: I wouldn't necessarily say that. We always want to come out fast any game we play. So I think it was just a testament to the first five guys out there, them being locked in, getting stops and getting out in transition. That's something that we want to do when we start every game.

I just say, yeah, that's it.

Q. For the two players, both of you shot the ball pretty well from the perimeter tonight. Milan you did in the Big 12 Tournament as well. What do you credit that to as you guys have started to shoot it well at a really important time in the year?

MILAN MOMCILOVIC: I give credit to all my guards. Keshon, Tam, and Curt get a lot of open shots, and I give credit to my big guys, Tre King and Rob Jones and Has. They send me a lot of flare screens, pindowns, and the guards find me. I have to just keep shooting it with confidence and be aggressive.

CURTIS JONES: Yeah, off what Milan said, pretty much the same thing. The bigs, they're always looking to get us open shots. Then Tamin, King, Milan, everybody looking for us to shoot the ball. They got 100 percent confidence in us and want us shooting the ball. So when you got guys on the team that don't care and want you to shoot, that gives you even more confidence on your shots.

Q. Coach, Keshon and Tamin have run the floor really well the whole season, but they had 12 of the 23 assists tonight. How big is it for them to continue doing that in the postseason?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: It's really important. Like these guys said, they set the tone. They pushed the break. They look for their teammates. They get in the paint. It's awesome to have multiple playmakers. We've got a lot of point guards on the court at one time. A lot of guys that can make plays.

Those guys continue to do a great job attacking the paint, attacking in transition, and looking for their teammates and making plays.



Q. Question for the two players. It's both of your guys' first year in the program. Watching you play on defense, the intensity you play with and how much you move on offense, has it taken you time to grow into -- to have energy to play that hard on both sides of the floor? Is that something that you have gotten more comfortable with moving on in the season?

CURTIS JONES: Yeah, I will say it has gotten better throughout the season, but we did it every day since June, and when you do something every day and just rep it out, rep it out, you get really good at it. I think we're starting to see the benefits of that right now.

MILAN MOMCILOVIC: Yeah, for me it was definitely an adjustment just coming from high school. It's a whole different level here at the Division I level. It's a standard that the coaches hold me to, to just be good on the defensive end and offensive end at the same time.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

