

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

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

CHI Health Center

## South Dakota State Jackrabbits

**Eric Henderson**

**Zeke Mayo**

**Luke Appel**

**William Kyle III**

Media Conference

Iowa State 82, South Dakota State 65

THE MODERATOR: The Jackrabbits are with us. Coach Henderson, Zeke Mayo, Luke Appel and William Kyle III represent the student body. Eric, please.

ERIC HENDERSON: Obviously, congrats to Iowa State. T.J. and the squad, they played great, so you have to tip the cap.

This is always tough when it ends like this. Our guys, I'm just so proud of the fight that we had and the compete that we had. They never succumbed to their pressure.

It's really hard to simulate when you are preparing for it, but the way our guys handled it, the way handled themselves, I'm so proud of them.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

**Q. Zeke, you guys got off to a little bit of a slow start there. I know we talked about their defense and the pressure and that all week. Was it a little surprising once you got out on the court?**

ZEKE MAYO: Yeah, it's something like Coach said, you can't simulate something like that. They fly to the ball like something we haven't seen all season.

Credit to them. They played fantastic on the defensive



end. I mean, it speaks for itself. They're a 2 seed. They came out and played how they have been. They showed up early in that game, and we fought back. We fought really hard, so I'm proud of our guys for doing that.

Yeah, they're a tough team.

**Q. Luke, a lot of times in this situation you know you look back and say, I wish we would have done this or that. Is this a game where you look at it and go that other team was really good? As well as they played, there maybe aren't going to be a lot of regrets. You just got beat by a really good basketball team?**

LUKE APPEL: Yeah, they are really good, but being down four in the second half after being down 15-3 is just a credit to our teammates and how well we stay together.

I mean, I would say we had a chance. We made a lot of shots. Credit to them. They played great, just like Zeke said, and there's a reason they're ranked No. 4 in the country and No. 1 defense in the country.

They made everything really hard on all of us, and it was just a tough game. All credit to them.

**Q. Obviously not the way you guys wanted the season to end, but when you guys kind of reflect on the season and how much you guys improved, especially midseason defensively, and it is run you had through the Summit League, and qualifying for the tournament here, just how will you guys reflect on this season?**

WILLIAM KYLE III: I would definitely say we made a lot of jumps at just being connect odd the floor. There were times at the start of the season where maybe you could tell that the ball wasn't moving as much. I feel like now we became connected all around and I feel like the ball started moving a lot, and I feel like it also transitioned into our defensive end of the floor, which really helped us in our run in the Summit League Tournament.

I feel like we made a lot of jumps. I feel like we also really loved on each other, which kind of helped us winning in the postseason.

ERIC HENDERSON: That's a great answer. I think it's a



testament to togetherness, like Will said. I think belief in each other continued to grow throughout the season. We shared the basketball, like Will said, way better the second half of the season than we did the first.

Our guys just honestly, like Will said, just loved each other. When you do that, good things can happen.

**Q. Question for you, Luke. You've been in the program now for quite some time. That was your last time walking off the court in this jersey. What was that like for you?**

LUKE APPEL: It's hard. You get to play in front of the best fans in the country in my opinion. They love on you ups and downs. I came here to win a lot of games, and we did that. Our team has won two Summit League Championships, and I don't think I could ask for anything more.

I had the best time I ever could have here, and I left it all out there tonight. I mean, that's just how it ended up. You just look at our other seniors like Charlie and Mims, and those are my brothers for life and Zeke and Will. I'll remember this team forever.

I don't think there's any regrets or anything. Everything was meant to be. We won the Summit League Championship. That was our goal, and we just fell short tonight.

**Q. Now that you've been the head coach in two tournament games, is there anything that you could pinpoint that would maybe help the program get over the hump and get that first tournament win?**

ERIC HENDERSON: I mean, I think that's an interesting question. I love our guys. I think a lot of things happen for reasons, and our guys came together. I've said this a long time. I say this quite often. I feel like we're going to win every game we play, so that's not going to change. Whether that's in the NCAA Tournament, that's in the Summit League Championship, or that's the first game of the year when we opened up with Akron.

Like I said, it doesn't always happen, but that's what we believe. We've had some great teams here, and we've battled in the NCAA Tournament. We battled tonight. A couple of things here and there, it's not like we were just completely out of it, and they played great.

I just kind of worry about things that we can control, and we played really, really hard tonight. We competed our tails off. There's a lot of different ways to measure success.

Obviously winning, if I don't win, I'm probably going to get fired. I respect that. But, but, there's a lot of ways to measure success. I wouldn't trade this group for any just because we lost in the NCAA Tournament.

**Q. I was going to kind of ask the same question Andrew did. Playing off your answer, what will be going forward kind of the next challenges, the next things this team looks forward to, if it's not necessarily we're trying to win this many games or win this many tournaments? How will you go forward from this?**

ERIC HENDERSON: I think it's pretty simple: We'll recruit really, really awesome dudes that have great character that play their tail off, that love each other, and we're going to go try to win every game we play.

**Q. Hendo, when Iowa State has it going like it had it going in the first half, can they be beat? And if so, how do you stop them? Not you. Anybody.**

ERIC HENDERSON: Yeah, I really -- when I was preparing for these guys, I looked at these guys like -- I watch a lot of basketball. These guys can win a national championship.

We scrimmaged T.J. and Iowa State before he ever played a game. His defensive principles -- and some of these guys were on that squad. He was just implementing those principles. They play so hard and they're so good on the defensive end, but what makes them have a chance to win the national championship -- and things have to go their way -- is their offense, the way they move, the way that they're connected, and the way that they know what they're really good at is special.

I've said before this, before the tournament started, I hope T.J. wins a national championship, and then I saw the pairings, and I was hoping that he would lose in the first round. Now I hope he wins a national championship again.

**Q. To go along with that, especially when Milan has it going like that, what do you think about him as a true freshman playing his first NCAA Tournament?**

ERIC HENDERSON: I mean, he was pretty impressive. He has great poise, like you said, for him playing in the first NCAA Tournament, the poise that he had, the patience that he had, the size that he has, the touch that he has.

That Dirk shot is kind of unguardable. You have to double-team him, get it out of his hands, and just not let him shoot it because it felt like they all went in.



I mean, they had 23 assists tonight. I mean, Tamin is the head of that snake and how he makes that team go is pretty special.

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