

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Washington State vs Iowa State

Friday, March 22, 2024

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

CHI Health Center

Iowa State Cyclones

Head Coach T.J.

Otzelberger

Tre King

Curtis Jones

Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have student-athletes of Iowa State University, Tre King and Curtis Jones, with us. We're going straight to questions, please.

Q. Tre, could you comment a little bit about just the inside game of Washington State? They've kind of moved that direction this season where they're kind of an interior team.

TRE KING: Yeah, definitely. Like you said, from last year to this year they definitely are a lot more paint-focused. They have a lot of size down there, a lot of athleticism. A really good player in Isaac Jones, a very good mid-post scorer.

Our plan is to just out-physical them and make them make a lot of decisions with the ball. That's something they haven't really had to do this season.

Q. This is for both players. Just talk about, is it an advantage for the Cyclones just having so many Cyclone fans over here and it's probably going to feel like another home game tomorrow?

CURTIS JONES: Yeah, it's definitely an advantage. I was happy we got to play here in Omaha because we knew the fans would be here for us.

It feels like a home game, you know, when they're with us like that. We were undefeated at home, so if it feels like



another home game for us, I'm confident in our chances at winning the game.

TRE KING: Likewise. Shout-out our fans for traveling and being as faithful as they have been. Just to have this advantage of them being so close, it definitely gives us that extra edge, extra chip and helps us to play even harder.

I think it also makes it even more intimidating for the other team seeing all the red and gold in the stands.

Q. Tre, you were here last year, right?

TRE KING: Yes, sir.

Q. Can you comment a little bit, you came out gangbusters against South Dakota State. I think you made something like your first nine shots, something like that. What did you guys do, I guess, from a preparation standpoint maybe that you didn't do last year because, of course, you guys probably had a less happy memory about playing Pittsburgh.

TRE KING: Yeah, for sure. Being on that team last year and the shooting struggles that we had, it definitely was a tender spot for us, a soft spot for the guys who are returning. We definitely didn't want to have that happen again this year.

In our preparation for last night, our biggest thing we focused on was just sharing the ball, making simple plays and playing for each other. Credit to our guys for doing that and executing it just as Coach wanted.

As a result, we went 9 for 9 to start the game, and that was a huge feeling and just to have that energy and seeing us play that well and firing on all cylinders really got us going.

Q. Both players, just talk about Washington State. Do you know much about them? Did you watch the game last night?

CURTIS JONES: Yeah, we got back probably close to halftime to the hotel yesterday and was able to watch some of that Washington State game. It looked like -- I didn't think they was going to win in the second half. They got down, but they came back. So that's a credit to them and



their resiliency.

They start I think four guys over 6'7", so we know they have a lot of length. We just have to try to combat that.

Q. Either one of you guys that would care to answer. It seems like every year Iowa State kind of goes into each year called an underdog. I think in the Big 12 you might have been picked middle of the pack this year. Do you guys like that underdog role, or is it an insult?

TRE KING: Yeah, we embrace it. Coming into this season when the Big 12 rankings came out, they had us predicted seventh I'm pretty sure. It's nothing new to us. We love being counted out. We love being looked down upon by everybody else because, you know, the theme for us this year is, "We owe."

Every time we have a big game where everybody thinks we're going to lose, we always rise to the occasion and show up in full force and win in extraordinary fashion. Credit to our guys just for not being comfortable with the success we have and just maintaining that mentality of us being that underdog and owing everybody that we face.

CURTIS JONES: I agree. I say we definitely embrace it. A lot of the guys that you look at on our team have been underdogs throughout their career.

If you look at the transfers, we all pretty much came from mid-majored. Me, I didn't have any offers out of high school. Ke, I know he wasn't heavily recruited. T.K. The list goes on. We got a lot of guys like that, and I think they recruited guys like us that have been underdogs. We embrace it. We wouldn't be here if we wasn't. So I'm proud of everybody for getting us to this successful season.

Q. Is there any sense of disappointment you're not playing Drake kind of in an all-Iowa game tomorrow?

CURTIS JONES: I wouldn't say it's no disappointment. I was ready to play whoever. Yeah, I'm not really disappointed in it, but it would have been a fun game. Probably a great atmosphere. I think it will still be a great atmosphere tomorrow.

TRE KING: Yeah, kind of going off what Curtis said, definitely we're ready to face anybody. For me personally it was a little disappointing because my dad did play for Drake and to play against his alma mater would have been cool.

Congratulations to them on the successful season they had. It just wasn't in the cards, so...

Q. I was wondering if you guys -- when you had that run in the Big 12 Tournament like you did and how you finished it off with that real nice victory over Houston, I know everybody wants to play their best this time of year, but did that tell you anything about yourselves about how far you might be able to take this thing?

TRE KING: Yeah, for sure. It definitely did give us a glimpse of just what we could be. We always talked about we didn't want to peak early. We wanted to kind of hit our stride right around this time.

Winning the way we did, we knew that our best basketball was ahead of us. I think that as a team, that was probably our most complete game that we played offensively and defensively. Just seeing that taste of what we could do gave us a good exciting feeling especially rolling into the tournament.

CURTIS JONES: I think I felt like we could go all the way since about the middle of conference. We were going into games thinking we would win every single game, so we're playing the best teams in the country in the Big 12 thinking we can win every night. I pretty much was confident in us ever since then.

Now that we're playing different teams, I still feel the same way, and hopefully we can take it all the way.

Q. Naturally a lot of your shots this season have come from beyond the three-point arc. They're a team that doesn't allow teams to take three-pointers. How do you go about counteracting that on Saturday?

CURTIS JONES: I think I'll just continue to take what the defense gives me, whether it's threes or trying to get to a flood or making a play for a teammate. You know, like Has yesterday was catching so many lobs today. Whatever the right play is trying to make that play and using my IQ to combat whatever they throw at us.

Q. To follow up with Tre, I know Coach Otzelberger has challenged you this year to be active on the glass and be physical, and that's a goal you have made for yourself. Against a team that's big and physical like Washington State, how much pride do you take in this being maybe your best opportunity to showcase those things?

TRE KING: I take it as a huge sense of pride, a big opportunity for me. I can't be more excited. I feel like every time we have these big games against more physical teams, I always have some of my best games.



I was talking with Coach T.J. He is like, Every time we play Houston, you've had one of your best games. Every time we play TCU, who were ironically two of the best rebounding teams, most athletic teams, and most physical teams.

I embrace the challenge. I'm excited for it. I'm ready to see what not only me, but the rest of the frontline guys do in this round as well.

Q. After what happened to Kentucky, the upset, do you talk about not looking past the next opponent, or do you pay any attention to all the other games that are going on?

CURTIS JONES: Being a fan of the game and just growing up watching it, obviously you look at the other scores. You look at the games. You know there's going to be upsets no matter what. Every March Madness it happens.

I feel like as a team we don't really look at it like that. We just go into every game with the same approach, whether we was playing a team like Houston or any other team. We're going in with the same approach, preparing the same way, and preparing to win the game.

No matter who we're playing, we're going to be prepared.

TRE KING: Definitely going off of that, just we do a great job as a whole of just staying focused on what's ahead of us.

Throughout this entire season we've done a very good job of just sticking to our daily habits and the job that we have to do each and every day. We do all follow these games, especially this time of year. It definitely is kind of surprising when you see a team like Kentucky go down, but we're not really worried about any of that stuff because we know what we do, and we've been successful all season doing it, so...

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, thank you very much. We have the Head Coach of the Cyclones. We'll have T.J. to make a statement and then go to questions.

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Proud of our guys last night for the start to the game and the start to the second half. When we are a team that dictates with our defense, it leads to get scenarios for us offensively. I'm proud of the way we shared the basketball. A credit to our guys for staying the course against a really good South Dakota State team.

Q. What do you think the biggest challenge will be facing Washington State?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: They have tremendous front court players, size on the interior. They do a great job getting the ball in the paint, getting the ball in the post, attacking the rim. Terrific offensive rebounding team. Really hard to keep off the glass. Those are some things that will pose challenges.

Definitely Rice in transition can really get out and go and push the break. He does a good job of running their team, changing speeds.

Then defensively they do a great job keeping you off balance. Zone to man, man to zone, mixing things up. They've done a great job defensively, and they have a lot of pride in their program. You can tell.

Q. You talked about their size. How do you go about combatting that when you are a program that talks so much about being able to dictate the focus of a game, and they have more size and potentially as much physicality?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: The ball pressure needs to be terrific. It needs to be hard for them to get the ball into the post into the paint. When they're able to do that, we need to be sharp on our rotations, whether we trap, whether we don't.

We have to make sure that we're in position to be mindful of that at all times and just try to bring a defensive presence. The speed of the basketball, hand-to-hand activity, all of those things are important.

Q. To throw so many different coverages at opponents like you talked about, what's the advantage of having multiple guards in you trust to be able to attack those different coverages, whether it's man, zone, different types of zone they may throw at you?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: It's important to us to have the ball on the move. When you have multiple point guards on the floor, it's a lot more effective and efficient offensively when multiple guys can attack the paint off the dribble, when multiple guys can catch it on the interior. That really benefits your team when you are playing against zones or changing defenses.

Fortunate with not just Tamin and Keshon, but Curt Jones has played a lot of point guard through his time, and Milan has been used to his whole career being a person that people have played through. We have been effective against zones this year because of that.

Q. Let's talk about the advantage of just having so



many fans over here cheering for Iowa State. How much was it yesterday? How much of an affect do you think it will have tomorrow?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Well, our fans and the young men in our program together has been a winning combination for us certainly. Our fan base is amazing. I mean, they continue -- for someone who has been a part of the university for the years that I have and you have all these experiences about this is the best environment, this is the best support in Kansas City, this is the best tournament game, whatever those experiences are, our fans continue to step up. Their passion, their enthusiasm, their commitment to Iowa State and our athletics program is special.

It's humbling, and it played a big factor in our game yesterday. We're hopeful that we know we'll have a great crowd again tomorrow. Just very fortunate and very thankful to our fans for the choices and sacrifices that they make to be here to support our young men because it gives us the energy and enthusiasm to push through some challenging times and be at our best.

Q. Talking to the players, it seems like they've really embraced the underdog role, and I was just kind of wondering, in your opinion, Iowa State it seems like year after year you guys go to the tournament, but yet, you're always considered an underdog. I think you were picked seventh in the Big 12 this year, but yet, you guys are second. I mean, what has to happen for you guys to not be called that anymore?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: You know, I just say this. We really relish having young men come into our program with a chip on their shoulder. When they have that internal motivation to want to be part of something bigger than themselves, when is they feel like as a unit the unity and connectedness that we have, we can play much better than the individual parts, that's what team sports and that's what this game is about. That's what our program is about.

I would say whether outside perception as underdog, outside perception as favorite, we don't get caught up in that as much. We take tremendous pride in playing with a chip on our shoulder, playing with an edge, and giving everything we have. Being a team that when you watch us play, we're playing as hard and as connected as anybody could play.

Q. You've talked a lot this year about having intense practices. Your players have echoed those things. How do you go about creating intense practices, and at this time of the year how much of an advantage is it to create pressure and intensity within practice when

those moments only arise in the NCAA Tournament?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, we outline the standards of what we will do in practice on a daily basis. We don't talk about any other scenario other than this is what it will be, this is what the standard is, this is what it looks like when we pressure the ball, this is what it will look like when we rotate, this is what it will look like in ball screen coverage.

We demand those things every single day until we get it exactly right. So we only know how to do things one way.

You're not going to play above the level of your habits in big games. You're going to always level at where your habits are at. So it's important that every single day we do it one way. It doesn't matter if it's a workout in June, a practice before the season in September, or what we do in a March practice. Everything has to be to that standard.

Our guys know that. They know what the standard is, and they hold each other accountable. I know football coaches say this they work hard, but their season sure seems a lot shorter. That's why those guys have much more of a voice left at the end. I apologize. Mine is quitting on me.

Q. Big-picture question about the world of college basketball with Samford and Kansas game last night at the end, you know, kind of a notable call there. What's your take on the college basketball review rules? Do you think fouls should be reviewable? Would you like to have a challenge maybe?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Good questions. You know, from my vantage point I think we're fortunate with the tremendous leadership that we have. I think that there's committees and groups that have been put together to look into all those sort of things.

Just like we try to do with our players, I keep my focus on what's in front of me and what we can control. I don't spend a whole lot of time having opinions on things that aren't relevant to us being at our best for today's practice or film session or game.

I'm great with the way we do things. Whatever changes are made in the future, we'll adapt to be great with those changes, and we're just going to do the best job we can coaching our team regardless.

Q. Would you have liked to have played Drake tomorrow, making it an all-Iowa contest or didn't it make any difference?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: We don't look ahead and have a preference that, sort of thing. We just focus on what the



reality is and what's in front of us.

Right now all that focus is on Washington State. They're a very well-coached team. They're playing with a lot of confidence. They played well late. They've gotten some big wins, so we know all of our focus and energy is committed to doing what we need to do to be successful against them.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

