

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

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

Fiserv Forum

Lipscomb Bisons

Coach Lennie Acuff

Media Conference



THE MODERATOR: Coach Lennie Acuff. Questions, please.

LENNIE ACUFF: Good morning.

Q. Hi, Lennie. With the injuries to some key players with Iowa State, how do you see the team now, compared to maybe how they were a couple months ago, and does that change your plan of attack at all?

LENNIE ACUFF: No, not at all. When you watched them in the Big 12 tournament, they're out two key guys. Looks like they'll get their point guard back. He's a nice player.

Relative to us, there's so much more size and physicality. I think he does a great job with his team. They're very impressive to watch. It jumps out at you how hard they play.

We lost a key guy the second week in January. We lost our center, who was, I thought, the best inside player in our league, and we lost him for the year, Dylan Faulkner. We just had other guys step up.

A lot of times when you have a proud program that's built on winning and culture, that's what happens. We don't expect anything less than their best tomorrow.

Q. Lennie, your players were talking a lot about the key, obviously, to protect the ball, not turn the ball over. When looking at Iowa State defense, Tamin Lipsey is the school's leading steals. How much of a unique challenge is that for a guy who has a lockdown defense and is adept at turning the ball over at the rate he does?

LENNIE ACUFF: The defense starts at the point of attack. He's usually the guy on the ball. He's got great, great

instincts. What I appreciate most about watching them is how convicted they are in how they play. It's one thing to say I believe in it, but they play with great conviction. When you turn the film on, when you see him into the ball, it's a problem.

So we've got to figure some things out. I think the biggest thing is we're not going to be perfect, we don't have to be perfect. We're going to make some mistakes. They turn everybody over. But the biggest thing is we've got to just make sure that we get on to the next possession, regardless of what happens.

It's a long game. Like I was watching them against Kansas State last night, one of the last times they played them. Kansas State was in a good spot and then six straight turnovers. That's how they play. You've got to have a short memory and a strong chin. You've just got to get on to the next play.

Q. Can you talk about just the joy that your program has, being here, the accomplishment.

LENNIE ACUFF: It's obviously something the kids have dreamed about their whole life. We've been Division I 23 years. They told me in the first 14 years, they've had one 20-win season. We've had six in the last nine. They were here in 2018.

The thing that's unique about our level, different from the Big 12, we're a one-bid league. The conference tournament is cruel. I mean, it is. It's cruel.

When you're the favorite and you're hosting and we won the league, and we've had two gut-wrenching loss the last two years in the tournament. To see these kids -- you know, Will, Joe, and Jacob, all three of the guys could have went other places and they came back. To see them rewarded for their loyalty -- because loyalty is a two-way street -- to see that meant a lot.

It's been a blessing to be a part of.

Q. When Iowa State was here, I believe, three years ago in Milwaukee, brought a lot of fans. Two upset wins. Talk about the added challenge of playing in front of a lot of red fans tomorrow.



LENNIE ACUFF: I had a couple of former players and assistants work for Steve Prohm there. I was talking to them this week. They were talking about Cyclone Nation. I know it's real. Good for them. That's the way it's supposed to be.

You know what? The reality of this deal is no matter where you go, it's going to be hard. That's the way it's supposed to be. And, you know, we thought we might get to a 13 seed, maybe even a 12. But it landed where it landed, and I promise you, there's 300 teams that would trade spots with us tomorrow. I promise you that.

The thing is, if we're fortunate enough to play well enough to at least hang in there for a while, there's two teams that are playing after us that probably are going to be pulling for us, as opposed to Iowa State. So hopefully, you can create an advantage there.

But this is a privilege. We played at Rupp, we played at Arkansas. Last year, we won at Florida State. We won at Louisville the year before. We won at Dayton when it was sold out. These guys have been in big environments.

If it doesn't go well tomorrow -- and I've said this since we found out who we were playing -- it's not going to be because the moment's too big. It's because we got beat by a better team. I believe that from the bottom of my heart.

Q. You talked about the experience on this team. You guys also have had to win games in the conference tournament just to get to this point. How do you think that experience helps you in a situation like this?

LENNIE ACUFF: I think you've just got to lean on those times. Even when you failed, what have you learned? What hasn't gone well? That's how we won our conference tournament. The last two years, we've had tough ones to end it. But just having all these guys back that have been through it and understand -- I know I said it earlier. You just have to have a strong chin. Because for us -- and we talk about this all the time -- we're going to have to survive the first eight to ten minutes tomorrow.

We can't simulate what they do. We can talk about it in practice. We can watch all the hours of film. But when they walk out the first time and they start pinning that ball on the side with great length and athleticism and effort and toughness, it will take a while to settle in.

We'll lean on the senior guards and Jacob, guys that have played a lot of basketball. You need some things to go well. You'll have to jump up and make some tough shots. At the end of the day, you'll have to have guys make some

plays. This time of year, there's no secrets. We're not going to run a play they haven't seen.

We're going to be who we are, and I think our guys believe in that.

Q. You talked about the loyalty aspect. Jacob was productive a couple years ago. He got hurt, decides to come back this season. What has he meant to this team? Obviously, you can see from a statistical standpoint what he's done. What has he meant to the team in helping you get to this point?

LENNIE ACUFF: He's a really, really good player. He's a great kid, got a great family. He was excited to come back. He told you he's never played a game in the state of Wisconsin as a college player.

I think loyalty is a two-way street. When he got hurt, we didn't push him to come back. We met right after the season. He had two years left. He's going into the portal this year. He's graduated. I'm fine with that. He's been a great player for us for four years. Go do it. Good for you.

I felt like we were loyal to him and it worked out as well. We didn't put pressure on him to come back. He said no, Coach, I want to come back and win a championship. When you do that, you're stepping out to the front of the line. You're saying not only am I going to run the marathon. I'm going to win it.

I have a ton of respect for him, Will Pruitt and Joe Anderson as well. All three are in graduate school, have their degrees. They could be in other places. To be part of this with them has really been a special time for our program and our school.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you. Good luck tomorrow.

LENNIE ACUFF: Thank you.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports