

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Second Round - Illinois vs Kentucky

Saturday, March 22, 2025

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

Fiserv Forum

Kentucky Wildcats

Trent Noah

Kenny Perry

Ansley Almonor

Media Conference



what the emotions were like when you heard from them and how quickly it transpired from that to being a Wildcat?

ANSLEY ALMONOR: Yeah. Obviously Kentucky is probably the biggest program in the country. It's always been a dream of mine to be able to put that jersey on. It was pretty late in the process when they reached out to me, but once I got the call from Coach Pope, I felt like I knew I belonged there.

Growing up, having this goal to be able to play on this level, once Coach Pope recruited me, I just felt like I had to make the move.

Q. Ansley, doubling down on that, what makes this team different. You guys were 350th in continuity. No one had played together. How have you guys been able to find your groove even with all the injuries that's impacted your team?

ANSLEY ALMONOR: It's just like a family. We're all brothers here. We did a lot of things throughout the season off the court as well as on the court just to make sure we're together. Ever since we got here in June, we've been working to become the family like we are today.

Like you said, when we have these injuries and stuff like that, we tend more to lean into each other instead of the outside things. We don't let distractions bother us because we're so close. That's one thing that's very unique about it. We're a very tight-knit brother-like program.

Q. I'm curious if Coach Pope's demeanor, style, the way he delivered his message changed at all this week heading into the NCAA Tournament? Obviously there's so much pressure, especially at a place like Kentucky. How has he dealt with that and how has he kind of passed that on to the guys?

KENNY PERRY: I don't think it really changed too much. He's pretty good about being consistent with us. That's something that I think makes it easy whenever we're out there playing and getting ready to play. He's really consistent in everything that we kind of do leading up to the game.

Q. Trent, that shot in the first half was huge. How much have you heard from your friends? How many texts did you have when you woke up this morning?

TRENT NOAH: Yeah. Definitely a few for sure. People down there, all they do is bleed blue. They watch the games, watch the replays, watch the highlights. The shot was for them. It was really cool and hopefully we can get the same result tomorrow.

Q. For the two in-state kids, you grew up watching this event, watching Kentucky play. How did the reality match it last night actually being on this side of it?

KENNY PERRY: Yeah. Obviously being from Kentucky, we watch it all the time. Kentucky is always here. So it's the thing to do. And over the past few years, there have been some disappointing results for sure. So there's the pressure of that going on on social media everywhere with the fanbase.

But I think we were focused on the task at hand. Really focused on getting the job done so we could play another game and I think we did that, and the support was really great for us.

TRENT NOAH: Yeah. Like he said, we came in with the mentality to stay present and just be us. We thought if we could just do us and execute and play like we do, we'd be in pretty good shape.

Q. Ansley, your portal recruiting journey last year was pretty wild. Can you take me back to maybe that first phone call or connection you had with Kentucky and



The main message he kind of had for us was just to take in the moment and realize that there's not many times that you get to be where you want to be in that moment. And before that game, obviously all of us, if we could pick anywhere to be in the world, we would pick right there about to play with those 15 guys about to play our first March Madness together. And that kind of puts it in perspective.

I think he does a good job of settling us down that way, knowing if we could choose to be anywhere we would choose right there. So that kind of makes it pretty easy.

Q. Trent and Travis, you guys have been asked to step up into roles a little quicker probably than you imagined due to injuries. How would you describe your journey this year?

TRENT NOAH: Yeah. It's definitely been a growing-up experience for sure, but I think Coach Pope has made it really easy for us. He's always instilled us with confidence, even when things weren't going well, even our players. Like Jackson yesterday was sitting on the bench, he would die to be out there playing with us, but he was super encouraging. And that's what makes this really special.

I feel like we're such a close family, and whenever you go out there, you can trust the brother beside you and it makes it easy for young guys like me, TP, and Collin.

KENNY PERRY: I agree with that. I think our team and coaching staff has done a great job all throughout the season in the moments where we needed us to kind of step or they've said a lot that we're just kind of being thrown into the fire.

We know we've got 15 guys there to back us up, 15 guys that believe in us, and that makes it really easy to go out there and play free and play for each other really in that moment.

MODERATOR: If I can ask and go right down the line, please. We'll start with Trent. From tape you've studied of Illinois, what do you think the keys will be in the game tomorrow.

TRENT NOAH: Yeah. Obviously Illinois is a really talented team. They're very well coached and they get up a lot of threes as well. So I just think the main thing is we have to keep them off the glass. But more importantly, we just gotta do us. We gotta play our solid basketball, play our game, get out in transition, get our threes up and wedge. So, yeah, they're obviously really talented, really good ball club, but I think we just gotta focus in and do us tomorrow.

KENNY PERRY: Yeah. Kind of those same things. They're a great offensive rebounding team. That's something that they strive on. When they're winning their games, they're making threes and rebounding the ball well.

So we want to really focus on defense and rebounding. I feel like we've been pretty good at that all year. Just kind of still focus on that, and like he said, play our game on offense, get out in transition, try and dictate the pace that we want to play at. And that should lead to us being successful.

ANSLEY ALMONOR: Illinois is a big physical team. We've been accustomed to playing in the SEC. So we gotta make sure we're ready for the battles. It's going to be a physical battle in the paint. We'll have to be able to crash the boards offensively and defensively and keep them off the boards while we're at it. And like they said, try to play our game and impose our will on the game and don't let them impose their will and just be ready for a 40-minute battle.

MODERATOR: Anything else for the student-athletes? All right. Thanks, guys, good luck tomorrow.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports