

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

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Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

Fiserv Forum

Illinois Fightin' Illini Kasparas Jakucionis Tre White

Tomislav Ivusic

Media Conference



Q. Curious, what have you heard from friends, family back home in Lithuania the last few weeks going into the NCAA Tournament here?

KASPARAS JAKUCIONIS: Not a lot, to be honest. I talk to my parents, to my family every day, and everybody knows that it's very exciting tournament, very important game, and every game matters. You win or you go home. I only got more motivation to play, to play in this tournament.

Q. Tre, question for you. It seems like you and Kylan have really embraced the leadership role. How has Coach Underwood helped you embrace that?

TRE WHITE: Definitely with the culture of the team, it starts with Brad, but us being one of the older guys, and we got a lot of key players on this team just trying to give our wisdom and experience trying to make us go as far as we can. So definitely stepping more into that.

Q. Tre, you came and played at Louisville and now facing Kentucky. Is there anything that still has that rivalry burning in you?

TRE WHITE: Not really. It's just another game for us that's a must-win for us. We're not trying to look too far ahead or get worried about any other team, really. Standing on our principles and we try to get those looks each game.

Q. Tomislav, what drew you to Illinois in the first place when you decided to come here?

TOMISLAV IVISIC: I would say huge part of that was assistant Coach Orlando, and just the program itself. I wanted to be in a place where I would have the opportunity to play, to develop my game, show what I know, what I can do. And just to be somewhere where I have the chance to win, to be in a good spot. And just to fight for the wins.

Q. K.J., to follow up on earlier, Brad talked yesterday about how you guys have played in big games before, back home overseas. How do these games specifically compare to some of those big stages you've been on back home?

KASPARAS JAKUCIONIS: Yeah. I think we both played pretty important games back in Europe. But every game is different. Every game matters, and especially here in March Madness, every detail matters in the game. Every stop, every rebound. So we just try to execute and try to use that little experience we got overseas to here.

Q. Just wanted to get your thoughts on your first experience in playing in March Madness?

TOMISLAV IVISIC: Yeah. It was great, and I just didn't expect that a lot of Illinois fans were going to come. And just a great atmosphere overall from both sides. Great energy, great energy in the arena. Both teams fighting. And just to know that if you win, you go next, if you lose you go home, with that mentality, just great to be there.

Q. For the three of you, I know that there's been a lot made of how you guys responded to the Duke game a few weeks ago and you getting humbled the way you did. Was there ever a feeling this team could break from that, that it was just too much to bear losing a game like that, being probably embarrassed in some way on national television? And if so, how did you get through that and rally the way you guys have in this season?

KASPARAS JAKUCIONIS: I think that that loss helped us a lot in all different ways, especially starting in practices. We were more dialed in every practice, executing more, and having more energy and staying hungry to just show who we really are. And I think that game just let us keep getting better, keep improving and try to execute more.

Q. Did yesterday feel like a home game with the crowd? Just with Milwaukee being so much closer to Champaign than some of the other sites, do you feel tomorrow might be a quasi-home game too as well?

TRE WHITE: Yeah. Most definitely. We felt it even before the game started. Coming in for layup lines, they were chanting our school chant. That definitely lit a fire under us, too. And for the opposing teams, I'm sure that has to be frustrating and draining to see the whole arena going against you. So it's definitely a blessing for us and looking forward for it tomorrow.

Q. I know your brother has a connection at Kentucky. But when I was speaking with the players, they mentioned how similar your playing styles are. I was wondering what you think about that and just how you think you can differentiate yourself maybe from what Big Blue Nation is used to seeing see?

TOMISLAV IVISIC: Yeah. A lot of people say we're similar, but there's also a lot of different things in our game. We both have a soft hand, good touch. I would say he's a better rim protector. I play more physical. But there's a lot of other similarities. Just we move similarly on the court.

But I would say the main differences are his defense and being able to block more shots, to be more present at the rim. And from my side, just to play more low post, be more physical on that end.

Q. Similar question, your brother is playing in a pretty big game right now, too. I was curious how often have you all talked this week and what was his reaction when he found out you were playing Kentucky?

TOMISLAV IVISIC: Yeah. We talk every day. I wouldn't say his reaction was anything special. He wished me luck, wished me luck, and that we can play good against them, that we can win that game.

It's just how would I say, business. No emotions on that side. So just another game to play and to do our best.

Q. I wondered how much of an adjustment was it playing in the States, just adjusting to life in Illinois and you have three different scorers from three different countries, none in the U.S. How have you all managed to build chemistry and have that cohesiveness with all these guys coming from so many different backgrounds?

TOMISLAV IVISIC: It was way easier than I expected, to be honest. Every one of my teammates, great guy, and we figured things out pretty quick. Started building on our

chemistry and our game plan, and just I felt like everything clicked from the first week and just we kept building on that.

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

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