

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

Sunday, March 23, 2025

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

Fiserv Forum

## Illinois Fightin' Illini

## Coach Brad Underwood

## Kylan Boswell

## Tomislav Ivisic

### Media Conference

Kentucky 84, Illinois 75.

**THE MODERATOR:** We are joined by Illinois Head Coach Brad Underwood and student-athletes, Kylan Boswell and Tomislav Ivisic. Coach?

**BRAD UNDERWOOD:** That game was decided at the start of the game and the start of the second half. Pretty much described by 26 points of turnovers, so 13 of our 14 turnovers were live ball. You can't turn the ball over. And give them credit, I think this was Lamont Butler's 12th NCAA Tournament game. I thought he controlled the ball on both sides and was extremely effective on the defensive side but turnovers at the start of the second half. We got a big play toward the end of the first half, loose ball that we don't come up with and put them on the line and we got it cut to three.

Our guys fought, competed, our guys played hard. It's a night that the other night we go 18 of 18 from the foul line, tonight we miss a few. Give them a lot of credit, Kentucky, defensively was really solid, and these two guys were excellent. They gave us every opportunity to try to get back in the game. We just couldn't get a stop, and the turnovers were the difference.

**Q. Kylan, being the veteran on this team, what do you tell the guys after the game as you go back to Champaign about what comes next?**

**KYLAN BOSWELL:** Just keep our heads up. All we can do now is enjoy the time that we had together.

**Q. Either of you, what was Kentucky's defense doing**



**that was kind of bothering you all, throwing you off balance there in the first five, ten minutes of the game?**

**KYLAN BOSWELL:** I would say they were intense from the jump. They were making stuff uncomfortable for us, Coach has been saying it, shocking your central nervous system. They did a good job with iso'in' the ball screen and that rattled us in the beginning but still we can't turn the ball over that much.

**Q. Kylan, I wanted to get your thoughts on the up and down season, but what are you most proud of with the team this year?**

**KYLAN BOSWELL:** Persevering through everything throughout the year. We're really, really young, had a lot of forks in the road for all of us, individually and as a team. But at the end of the day, I feel like we persevered, fought through adversity, leaned on this dude right here, and leaned on each other, put into confidence each and every day.

**Q. Tomislav, can you talk about what this has been like for you this season?**

**TOMISLAV IVISIC:** It was great experience. I really liked it here. Even though we didn't finish the season how we wanted to, still a great experience. Glad that I was a part of this team, this group, and, yeah, we'll come back.

**Q. If you do get a good chunk of this roster back, what can this experience in the tournament and the season as a whole mean for you guys going forward?**

**TOMISLAV IVISIC:** I think if majority of the team comes back, everyone is going to be year experienced, year older, and that means a lot in these games, in these tournaments. Just more opportunity to practice, to work on our game, to perfect -- how do I say? Do our offense more detailed, defense and everything. Just be better.

**THE MODERATOR:** Thank you very much. Questions for Coach?

**Q. Coach, reflect on how this team was constructed really beginning this time last year, last spring. Does it now become about trying to hold a majority of the**



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## group together?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: It's always about that. Unfortunately we don't have a lot of control over that. I think the one thing we knew last year is we were very old. I think there is a balance, in terms of age and experience and youth and trying to figure that out. I thought we had a group that was -- I enjoyed coaching, a group that was fun to coach, a group that loved to play. We sat out with positional size. Shooting, I think we knew that we were going to rely on some young guys and we were going to lean heavily on Kylan and Tre White and Ben, as guys who were veterans. Even though they were new to our system, those guys were older. Those guys were exceptional.

At the end of the day we were a very young team, one of the youngest in the tournament. You get a bunch of guys playing in their first or second or third NCAA Tournament against a guy like Lamont Butler who has 13, or 12, but, you know, it's -- I love this team. I had -- I told them in the locker room postgame, I have had as much fun coaching this team as I have any team.

Their ceiling was high. It was a hard year, because of the adversity we went through, but it's not going to dampen my belief in what this team could achieve, and we got stunted a little bit with all the sickness and the injuries, but, man, it was a blast. It was really fun to coach this group.

### **Q. Brad, Kentucky scored on 14 of their first 17 possessions in the second half. What happened there?**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Turnovers. We opened the half with turnovers. We got the game in a great place and, you know, it was just -- called a quick timeout. I felt like Kentucky would always let us back in the game. That's what they do. I felt like we had ample opportunities, so I didn't want to burn all my timeouts; you want to save them toward the end, but you can't give a team 26 points after turnovers. They turned it over five. You just can't do that in this type of game and expect to win.

### **Q. Coach, you said you love seeing the emotion of guys. You talked with Sanford after the Iowa game, Will Riley needed to be consoling. Mark Pope went up to him, some of the guys on your bench. Talk about the emotion that guys feel in this moment and what that makes you feel as well.**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Yeah, something comes to an end. When you are invested in it -- and our whole locker room was that way. You got guys that -- you've got coaches. I've got the best staff in the country; we got coaches crying. Something comes to an end -- realize we spend way more

time with them than we do our families.

So you build a bond, you build a connection. We're a family. Those guys and every player that's played for me is part of our family. They've got my number. They can call me now or 20 years from now. I coach one of my former players' sons. That's what this thing is about. You guys make it about all the wins and losses -- 25 years from now, some of those kids, I hope I'm still alive, are going to pick up the phone and call me and need me, and I am there for them.

That's what the relationship is and that's why it hurts. I couldn't be happier to see that, because that means I know I've connected in the right way with a group of guys that I loved coaching and feel great about giving my time and my energy and my focus to them to help them try to achieve something.

To me that's what this is all about. And unfortunately we came out on the wrong side today, but, man, I'll have nothing but positive things about this season and this group of guys, and that's part of it.

### **Q. Brad, you mentioned the shooting with respect to the roster construction, and I know all season you kept thinking the shooting was going to come along, but it never really did. Any thoughts about what was the struggle with shooting?**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I will figure that out later. I don't know. If you ever watched us in pregame warm-ups, we didn't miss. Shooting was come and go. I think some of the challenges mid-season were newness and freshmen and early and mid-season without Tommy. There is a different aspect of him on the court, but we will figure that out and try to get it solved.

### **Q. Brad, I know you had film on Kentucky's center, Amari Williams, but a lot of other coaches have said when they see him in person, he's bigger, more mobile. What does he do for their team? How far do you think Kentucky can advance?**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Oh, I think as far as Lamont wants to take them, I think. I think they're really good. They're old, they're experienced. I think Lamont gives them leadership. I think he's very good. We saw Amari as a freshman, when he was at La Salle, so it wasn't any shock there. He's just five years old and more mature. He's got great length and size. He's a very unselfish player, willing passer. So he allows Koby Brea and Otega and those guys to cut and move, and he affects the game, he impacts it there is no doubt. Very good player, and I think they can -- they can beat anybody.



**Q. Just curious, obviously this season ended shorter than what you wanted, you made it to the Elite 8 last year. Talk about the evolution of the last few years and where you see this team heading with roster construction being different next season and moving forward?**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Let me say this when it comes to teams. I came here to win a national championship, okay? And I think the one thing that will never change with me is that. We're trying to do that. But to do that, you have to have a great program. I count COVID, unlike everybody else who doesn't. We got a banner that should be hanging in our gym that we got screwed out of in that deal.

Then we've got six straight NCAA Tournaments. To me that's about building a program of consistency, of culture, and I think the one thing that I take -- my work ethic, is to build a great program and just keep getting here. It gives you a chance.

Are we disappointed? Absolutely, because my goal is nothing more than to win a championship. If you ever hear me say anything other than that, then it's probably time for me to hang it up. But our program is in great shape. We've got great leadership. We've got great facilities. We've got the ability to keep getting players. We sell out every night, we got the best fan base out there and, you know, we came up short today, but we'll be back. We're not going anywhere.

**Q. Brad, what is your hope as far as a carryover from this experience. For the guys that come back, obviously guys will have to make decision but ideally what do you hope that this will turn itself into?**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Experience, carryover. It's one of the challenges of getting older is having carryover in your program. Young man from Iowa; he spent four years there. I hope that's the case with certain guys. I think we will have conversations with guys and see where it's at. It's a complicated process in today's world.

The portal opens tomorrow; a lot of rest. And you've got guys that you know are good enough for the NBA, and they'll have decisions to make. It's a never-ending process. We've been making calls and checking the portal on a daily basis since we've been here, for the grads. But we'll hope there is a nice group back, and we can build on this and try to win a national championship.

**Q. Brad, you talked about the adversity of the season. Just wanted to get your thoughts on looking back at the season as a whole. What's been the thing that's**

**made you the most proud?**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Yeah, they never quit. We hit some speed bumps, now, and if you've got a little bit of a shaky locker room with character, we could have gone south pretty easy. My 38 years I haven't seen anything like I saw this year. I hope I don't see it for another 38 because it was challenging.

Just the ability to practice some days. They hung in, man, this group -- that's why I love 'em. This group will always have a special place in my heart because of their resilience, their toughness, their love for the game. I keep saying that all the time. This group loves to play basketball. They're all good friends, and that's fun to be a part of.

**Q. Brad, you made it clear what the standard or the goal is, national championship. Some of the fans may -- they look at what this program was before you took it over and how you elevated it. There could be people who follow this program who don't have that same standard. What would be your message to them to make them believe that the national championship should be the goal?**

BRAD UNDERWOOD: If they haven't heard me say that before, they be they're probably not our fans. Because I've said it since the day I got here, my introductory press conference. And I'm going to keep saying that. I think we've built something that can stand the test of time. I think our program, our fans, I've said it a lot. If they're not on board now, then they're probably -- I don't know, they're somebody else's fans; they're not ours.

We are playing a national schedule every year, competing at the highest levels. We're producing really good players who are really good people. I think there is a lot that our fans can be really, really proud of. We're going to come back next year with a group of guys that are going to have the same goals and ambitions.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

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