

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

Sunday, March 23, 2025

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

Fiserv Forum

Iowa State Cyclones

Coach T.J. Oltzelberger

Curtis Jones

Nate Heise

Media Conference

Ole Miss 91, Iowa State 78

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for joining us. We will take an opening statement from Iowa State Head Coach T.J. Oltzelberger.

T.J. OTZELBERGER: First, I would like to credit Ole Miss and their program. They did a great job tonight. Defensively really disrupted our offensive rhythm. So credit goes to them.

At the same time, I'm really proud of the young men in our program, how they fought all season. Tonight wasn't our best, but it also doesn't define us. The young men in our program have fought a lot this year, and we're proud of how they have worked every single day.

And all of them can say they left the program in a better place. So proud of these guys.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. I think you were up 13-5 a few minutes in the game. What caused the game to flip there when they went on their run?

CURTIS JONES: They made a couple tough shots at the end of the shot clock that hurt, that gave them momentum. They went on a run after that. I know we came into the media under 12, I think it was 16-15, or something like that. They was up. And they got it to 10, and it only expanded from there. Credit to them.

Q. Curtis, you knew their game plan. Did they throw



you guys off in the beginning, and did it affect your shooting abilities?

CURTIS JONES: I don't know if it threw us off, we knew it was coming. Maybe we didn't execute the best against it. That hurt. But I feel like we missed some good shots in the first half, they didn't. That's really what caused that deficit going into halftime.

Q. I think in four of your last five games, opponents hit at least ten three-pointers. What do you think led to some of those struggles defending the three-point arc over the last three or four weeks of the season?

NATE HEISE: I would say we struggled to stay in front of our guy and guard the ball. Then that put us into rotations. I think that's where a lot of the threes came from, is two guys going to the ball, and then someone being open on the back side or something like that. So I would say that's why.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen. Questions for Coach.

Q. I think you talked about the toughness, the physicality you were expecting to see from Ole Miss yesterday. What you saw, how did that compare to what you had seen in terms of the way they played?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: They're a team that plays with a lot of toughness. They're connected defensively, their switching can be disruptive. At times it wears on you mentally, you're not able to get the ball in the paint and not get the normal plays that you want to make.

Offensively they do a really good job within the realm of their motion, keeping the basketball on the move and not allowing our pressure to settle in. Both certainly paid off for them, and what we saw on film showed up for them tonight.

Q. Tell us about the last two months for you guys and what the frustration level might be to know that you didn't get a chance to attack this at full strength since January.

T.J. OTZELBERGER: I would say for our team this year,



you know, to start the season with the expectations and the ranking that we had all year long, there was a higher magnitude with every game we played.

Certainly disappointment, wanting to fulfill and live up to those, the competitors that we all are, every single day. I look at the entire season and say, you know, you start the year preseason 6, you win 25 games, you finish in the top five of the league. There's a lot of great things our guys accomplished. Still at the end being a top-three seed we wanted to go on a run and be at full strength. But what happens for a lot of teams this time of year is injuries happen, disruption happens and what you need to be able to do is continue to move forward the best that you can.

If you look at the season we were able to do that for the start, and then certainly with Milan, Tamin, Keshon, there are things that happen from an injury standpoint that disrupted that rhythm. Our guys kept fighting, they kept competing, they kept coming to practice every single day and I'm proud of how they continued to move forward. The guys who were out there, I really feel like we left it on the court. Did we play great tonight? No. It wasn't our best, but our guys didn't stop fighting and I'm proud of them for that.

Q. Coach, you said that this game doesn't define the season, it doesn't define this team. When you look back on this season and this squad specifically, what are those moments that you lean on that you can build on moving forward if this is not a true definition of the team?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: To start off I thought we had a really good nonconference season. We played in a really difficult tournament. We had some challenging games. We were able to go on the road and win impactful games win big games in front of our fans, and I thought we had a good showing in the Maui Invitational, which is as good as any tournament in the country.

So the nonleauae, our guys accomplished a lot. We got into conference, started 5-0 had and we had some injuries and some disruptions. That caused us to not be at that same full strength that we were. We tried and worked and were diligent in our efforts throughout the course of the season to reestablish that, and I think down the stretch in league play we were able to string together four wins again in league play, four in a row, late in the season, which is also impactful, and then finding ways to win on the road our last regular season game.

I thought we played really well in the conference tournament. So, again, when you win 25 games and you play in the Big 12, which is one of the best leagues in

America, you win 13 league games, there are a lot of great things that happen. So even though we had high hopes and goals to make a run in this tournament, it doesn't diminish the things that the young men in our program accomplished throughout the course of the season.

Q. Looking at the numbers you guys allowed 1.4 points per possession, which is the most I believe allowed during your tenure at ISU. Ole Miss 11 for 19 from three, 6 for 8 in the second half. Is this one of those games you have to tip your cap to the opponent and the shots they made?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: We could have been better defensively, as Nate mentioned. Guarding the ball and not having two have to come to the basketball if we guard it better one-on-one, we don't get in rotation, they don't get open there's. Same thing happened in transition. I give them a lot of credit. We had them down, I think, 13-5 early, and we were looking like we were in control of things. They found ways to make tough shots at the end of the clock.

I believe they were 9 for 9 from the foul line, so they were taking advantage of those opportunities. Their efficiency is on both sides. We could have been better with our pressure and credit to them, because they did a great job making the shots they needed to make.

Q. You talk about culture and what this team is built on and when asking Curtis about what he learned at Iowa State, the first thing he said was growing into a man. When you hear that, what does that say about Curtis that that is the first thing that comes to mind?

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Yeah, it says a lot about his character. Obviously we're highly competitive, we want to win every single game. We want to be playing in this tournament until the very end. Yet I take it with a very high level of responsibility to build men in our program, to teach them what daily habits need to be to be successful in life and in everything that you do. We take a very honest and direct approach in how we do that, and we want the young men coming into our program to be better as a result of our program.

Having Curtis say that means a lot to me because I want to build a program where young men come in, and they are successful in whatever endeavor they choose as they move forward in life. So to hear him say that, hopefully that means in the realm of our program that's happening, and it sounds like it is for Curt.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you Coach.

T.J. OTZELBERGER: Thank you.

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