

National Invitation Tournament: Auburn vs Illinois State

Thursday, April 2, 2026

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Hinkle Fieldhouse

Illinois State Redbirds

Ryan Pedon

Ty'Reek Coleman

Ty Pence

Semifinal Postgame Press Conference

Auburn 88, Illinois State 66

RYAN PEDON: First of all, awesome to be a part of this tournament, and I'm really proud of our team and making this run here at the end.

This is a privilege to be playing basketball this time of year. These guys next to me are a big reason that we're doing that, and I leave here very proud of my team, first and foremost.

Give credit to Auburn. They were tremendous tonight. Tremendous. That was an NCAA Tournament-caliber team, no question. Not bubble. Like, they were that good. So I give them credit.

You know, there's aspects that I wish we could have and would have done better for sure. But this is one of those nights that I look in the mirror and I say: They were just better tonight.

And like I said, give them credit. I thought all facets of the game, they were quick to the ball. It was one of their very best shooting nights of the year. You know, they were on fire in the first half, and I think five of ten in the second half, as well.

So they deserved credit. They play like that, they will be walking out of here with some hardware.

Congratulations to them.

Very proud of my team for a season and for a run that I think was a lot of fun.

Q. Obviously the team had 18 turnovers. What made



Auburn defensively so hard to make your passes that you're used to making against other teams?

TY'REEK COLEMAN: I would say their athleticism. You know, coming into this game, we knew that they were going to be a quick team as far as getting out and running and being in passing lanes. They do a good job of trying to disrupt our passes and flow of offense.

Started with the guards early. I would speak for myself, I didn't do a good job of looking off some passes, and they were able to get tips on it. Even driving downhill, we knew they were going to lose sight of the defenders and swarm towards the ball, and we had to see early kickouts. And I think we just let a couple of them get away from us which allow them to get comfortable in the transition and grow their lead.

Q. This could be for either one of you guys, but just offensively, with all the fans in the building, what does it mean to you guys seeing all that sea of red and the momentum that gave to you guys?

TY PENCE: I mean, it was awesome. It was really, really great to see all of our fans here. They really showed out for us. They have been great all year. It's been awesome to play in front of them, and we're sad we weren't able to get the job done tonight. But we always appreciate them and we just thank them.

TY'REEK COLEMAN: Going off what Ty said, want to give a thanks to the fans for obviously traveling, coming to support. They did a great job of creating some momentum for us, especially early throughout the game. Just.

Sticking through and staying with us, even through what occurred over the whole course of the game and just want to say thank you to them.

Q. How were you able to get in the flow you were in offensively?

TY'REEK COLEMAN: I was able to utilize my speed to get

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downhill. They were switching ball screens. So I got a lot of matchups where it was just a five on me. And I know Coach overemphasized coming into the game we get that switch not to back it out, just go and attack and see the early kicks, and I think that's what allowed me to get going early.

I think the first half, they did -- they were defending out when I was driving, so allowed me to get down the hill with them when they start the second and play off two and find the open man and make the right play.

Q. For both you guys, what has the opportunity to play more basketball been like? And Ty, you were part of the CBI run last year, both these years, what has it done for your program?

TY PENCE: Yeah it's been awesome. Any time you get to play postseason basketball and regular basketball after the regular season, it's a blessing. It's been really fun to play more with our seniors. They have been great. Those are my guys, and yeah, it's just been awesome.

TY'REEK COLEMAN: Going off what Ty was saying it, was good to represent the seniors. Obviously we didn't have the result we wanted in our conference tournament.

So getting an opportunity to come out here, get going, make it to the Final Four, just experience this environment for the first time, this is our first time coming to the Final Four in school history since 1899, and so like this was just good for the Illinois State community, getting to witness this and again getting more opportunities to play with our teammates and seniors.

Q. This season, Coleman and Klabo had a huge impact on the team. Can you speak to their impact as freshmen and what it means to go program going forward?

RYAN PEDON: In their own right, both very different in some regards, and also have a lot of similarities in other aspects. Just proud of the contributions that they make. Those are real contributions. They contributed to us winning.

We weren't the same team, and wouldn't have been the same team without Ty'Reek Coleman and Mason Klabo, period. And for freshmen guards, you don't see that. You don't see that a lot, right, with two guys playing extended minutes, near 20 minutes a night.

I've got great confidence and faith in both of them and just really proud of them. Really proud of their growth. It's a long season. That's something that I noticed, they stayed

the course. That's a long season compared to a high school season. You know, we started practice third week in September, and here we are, first week in April. I'm proud of their growth and maturity, and I think sky is the limit for both.

Q. You heard Ty mention the seniors. What has their leadership done throughout the season to help you stay calm? You get to the postseason, and they keep wanting to play basketball before their career end.

RYAN PEDON: I think guys are always going to follow the lead of your leaders and older guys, and for us, we had four seniors that all had distinctly different journeys in their careers and also here at Illinois State.

I thanked them in the locker room for their strength, and those four guys, didn't always go their way. Probably didn't always play the minutes that they wanted to play. Wasn't like we had, you know, no adversity. We had different spots of adversity throughout the season, and if your older guys flinch, your team flinches, and our older guys didn't flinch.

So I'm thankful. I thanked them on behalf of all of our coaches, our entire program for their contributions. They elevated our program. I sat in that locker room a year ago after the CBI and thanked our seniors in much of the same way. I thanked them for elevating our program.

I feel the same way about this group here. Undoubtedly they have helped to elevate our program. It's not where we want to be, yet, but we are well on our way. And thanks to them, we can hold our heads high. Here, we leave Indianapolis and the NIT Final Four, there's so much to be proud of, and those four seniors contributions are a major reason why.

Q. What does it mean to play in a venue like this and a tournament like this, and what does that do for your program?

RYAN PEDON: I think that's a great question because I think that it does a lot if you allow it to, even playing, getting beat, being able to be on the same floor in a tournament atmosphere.

Like that was a straight NCAA Tournament atmosphere there, and that's what it feels like when you're on a neutral site and you have a passionate fan base and games going back and forth and that's the talent level you're going to have to beat. That's good for our guys to go against that. They are a better team. They were more talent the. They were better tonight. Give discrimination they had. Give them credit.



But it's great for our guys to be able to see what it looks like when you do get to that stage, and Auburn is a really good team, really well-coached, and I think this experience can do a lot of good for our program as a whole but also individually for the guys coming back.

Q. What role did their speed play in the game in this game?

RYAN PEDON: Extreme. Their quickness, if you look at the first half, it legitimately -- what was the difference? The difference was the live ball turnovers.

I didn't think our physicality, our presence defensively was anywhere near -- like I was asked at halftime, my thoughts, and I said two things: Live ball turnovers, it's the whole difference right now.

And secondly, I said we are a very physical defensive team but I didn't feel like if a casual fan were watching the game that they would have said that about us in the first half it.

And again, some of that is controllable by us. Some of that, I tip my cap to Auburn. They are a big reason for that. They played tremendous. Like they hit shots from the very beginning. They saw the ball go through, and that permeated on the defensive end as well. I mean, that sort of snowballed, and you know, it's uncharacteristic for us to give up 50 points at the half. I don't know if that's happened all year.

Again, give them credit, and I think that was the real difference in the first half.

Q. You hit on it a bit but what specifically about that Auburn offense made it so hard for you guys to keep up with?

RYAN PEDON: The offense, yeah, I think 33 tonight, I think he's a really good player. I think he's a really good player. He hit three threes. I think he's hit eight threes on the season at a 25 percent clip. So there's nine points that they are not used to getting. He was hitting.

Overton hit three of his four -- four threes in the first half in transition, and they were no-doubters, impressive shots. Impressive.

Their transition game got going. I think a lot of their success in the first half came in transition. Overton's three threes, 33, I believe banged a three in the first half, and then the live ball turnovers. That was it. I mean, I think that was the story of the first half.

You know, their defense, I thought really controlled the game. They have had moments where they have been really, really good defensively, and that affects their offense in a very clear way.

So I think when they played both sides of the ball at that level, they are tough to beat, and they are like -- that would be a 6-, 7- 8-seed in the NCAA Tournament to me. That's what I saw.

Q. You guys came into the season, really high expectations. To come here, even after losing in St. Louis in the quarter, to come here, rally the Redbird family. Does it give you a sense of closure on the season that maybe a lot of mid-major programs don't get?

RYAN PEDON: Well, sure, we were one of I think eight teams playing right now, you know, left in the nation. Here we are in April. Yeah, I've coached 26 years. I've never coached a game in April. This is awesome. I could keep going for weeks.

I think it gives me a sense of closure. I think the end of the season does that. I'm not always the best at perspective in the moment. I do think it's a strength of mine when I can step away and digest some of my emotions or my feelings.

But end of the season is hard for everybody because it's abrupt, right. You don't -- I envision tomorrow preparing for a championship game, and not going to be able to do that. Yeah, that's tough. It's an abrupt end for all of us.

So what I walk out of this building feeling is, yeah, disappointment that we couldn't have played better tonight. The but I think my experience tells me that I'm damn proud of my team, and where they came this year, where it's going, the guys in that locker room, their growth, my seniors, and the contributions of our younger guys that are the next generation of Redbird, they are going to take a hold of this program and take it to even greater heights.

Q. So four years, you've been at Illinois State, consistently getting better every year, which is really difficult to do in the current college basketball landscape. What do you and your staff, let alone the university need to do, to take that next step? And second part, does Illinois State mean to you?

RYAN PEDON: I'll start with that. Illinois State means a lot to me. Yeah, Illinois State gave me my first chance, right, my first opportunity. I was an assistant coach for 22 years, and they gave me my first chance, and I think we all remember the company or the boss or the person that hired you to give you your first opportunity.

And I say this whenever I can: Being the head coach at Illinois State, that means a lot to me. And my heart wants to do the university and our fans and our alumni -- I want to do them proud. I want to do them proud.

I think what we're building is special. I just -- I do. I'm still holding on to the old model. And maybe in two years, I'll be completely jaded, I don't know. But I'm going to fight like hell to continue to build a program, not a team, a program, that we're not going to retain everybody but that is able to regenerate itself in a consistent fashion year after year after year to put ourselves in position to compete for the Championship and our conference, which is -- which is tough, which is difficult.

Second part of your question, what does our program or athletic department or universe need to do? I think it's obvious across college basketball is the commitment level to retain the guys that you're trying to retain, and have the resources and the evaluations.

I think part of it is the evaluation as coaches, too. Our job becomes even more important in terms of the evaluation process because we're not going to have a \$12 million roster, right. So we've got to be able to find the diamonds in the rough a little bit, too, while retaining your main core group of guys.

It's easier said than done. I get that. But what we can't control in this era that no one talks about is the experience that they are having. Imagine that: The student athlete experience. I might be the only coach in America that has uttered those words this decade. "The student athlete experience"; I'm still holding on to that. The relationships, still holding on to that. If I have the right people, I just believe things have a way of taking care of themselves more times than not.

Again, we are not going to always keep everybody but if we can keep the vast majority of them, we can build a championship program, and I think these four years have shown we're well on our way to doing that.

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