

Big Ten Conference Men's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Illinois Fighting Illini

Brad Underwood

Tomislav Ivisic

Kylan Boswell

Postgame Press Conference

Illinois - 106, Iowa - 94

THE MODERATOR: We've been joined by the University of Illinois. Coach, we'll ask you to make an opening statement.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: If I could get some glass cleaner, it would be fabulous. Derek gave me his glasses, and it looks like a 4-year-old just got done eating peanut butter and jelly.

High-level basketball game. Didn't expect anything any different. I thought that Iowa's been playing exceptionally well. They've been in kind of postseason mode here for a few games. Their Michigan State game was exceptional. Obviously going to Lincoln and winning. Then surviving.

The one thing we didn't want was Payton to get going. I will mention this. So much respect for Payton. He stayed four years. I love seeing guys cry when it's over. That's invested. That's committed. That's dedicated. That's love for his university. That's love for his coaching staff.

That young man had just an unbelievable career. He had a terrific game today.

I thought these two guys to my right, Tommy got us off to an incredible start. I thought Bam controlled the second half. Tommy ends up with a double-double, six assists, one turnover, pretty good night.

We withstood. They hit some hard shots. I was frustrated early, but they were hitting a lot of mid-range pull-ups that I thought were really tough, and they really stress you. Both these guys were great, and I thought we got a great game out of Tre and Will. Both those guys on the wing are



playing really well right now.

Q. Tommy, what started you out here today -- shooting from threes, stepping to the free-throw line, just a great start for you this afternoon.

TOMISLAV IVISIC: It was great. First, that was the play we wanted to do. We played pick and pop, and I was wide open, and I had to shoot that ball. It went in. I feel like that opened the game for me and made other shots way easier.

Q. Tommy, I don't know if you've been watching more Jokic videos lately, but the passing from top of the key, what clicked with you running that kind of offense, and what you kind of added being that kind of guy?

TOMISLAV IVISIC: I don't know. I'm always looking for my teammates in those cuts whenever they're open. I feel like they recognize that if they're open and I see the space, I'm going to throw it, even if it's sometimes bad pass or turnover.

I feel like we're pretty used -- my teammates are pretty used to me throwing the ball there, and it's working pretty well now.

KYLAN BOSWELL: For me that's probably become a big part of just like my scoring is being able to give him the ball and just be able to cut. The majority of the time, I just know look up and the ball will be in the area where I can get in and go score.

Tommy's a terrific passer.

Q. Kylan, your confidence seems to be through the roof right now. When did it start clicking for you, particularly after that trip to New York?

KYLAN BOSWELL: After that game, after we got our butt kicked, for me I felt like I was just thinking too much when I was out there and for our team to win and be at our best, I need to help lead us and help be at my best personally.

I just had a little mental switch, put all the work I needed to



in the gym, and it's just been clicking on the court so far.

Q. Kylan, there was the technical came in the second half. You went to the line, and then a second technical came, and you stepped back, and you sent KJ to the line. What went into that decision?

KYLAN BOSWELL: During the timeout, I could tell KJ was thinking too much, he was frustrated. When you get to the line, you get four free throws and see the ball go in the rim. It helps any player get a rhythm. He was kind of going back and forth about it, and I just told him go shoot the free throws. "Go make all four of them." Went there, hit on all four and he was just in the right mode. Coming back on defense, he said thank you, and that was it.

Q. Tommy and Kylan, last four games you've won by 60 points. Other than health, what's the biggest difference between the team we saw tonight and the one that played Michigan State, Wisconsin, and Duke?

KYLAN BOSWELL: I'd say our confidence level. All of us have been just clicking with our chemistry, taking more pride on the defensive end, not letting anything make us fearful or any kind of situation.

I think all of us right now just in practice are trying our best to go as hard as we can, and I feel like it's just been translating onto the court.

Q. Tommy, your first taste of March basketball, playoff basketball, what did you kind of learn about it today? And knowing that it's win or go home.

TOMISLAV IVISIC: I don't know, it feels like every other game, if you lose you go home. If you win, you go next one. Hope that we can win it all.

Q. Kylan, when the pace of the scoring is as quick as it was tonight and as back and forth as it was at times, what does your mindset need to be?

KYLAN BOSWELL: We work on that in practice getting up and down. Each and every day he's having us push the ball in transition and try to get into our offense quickly. We want teams to do that because that's where we feel like we're at our best when we can push into transition and get into our offense quickly. That doesn't faze us.

Q. Obviously you're healthy. It's a big difference. Why do you think this team is (no microphone)?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: We had a heck of a game there. We had a heck of a game the first time. Obviously Tommy wasn't in the game. They were very good. We haven't

seen them in a little bit. It will be a different challenge than tonight. They've got great guards that really shoot it.

Obviously Queen and JuJu (Reese) are very, very good. So, yeah, it will be a different challenge, but our health is the big thing. We got in foul trouble in that first game. We had some pretty small guys trying to guard those guys in post-ups.

Q. I just wanted to get your assessment of Morez Johnson tonight and his 11 minutes.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I thought it was great. I was really concerned about him maybe overthinking things. We talked today and yesterday -- run, rebound, and defend. Run, rebound, and defend. Let's not get too complicated.

He has only had two days in practice with some of the defensive changes we've made. So I thought he was fantastic. He impacted the game. Kind of did what I wanted to do, which was just get his feet wet, and tomorrow may be a different story.

Q. Brad, Tommy's ability to space the floor and pass and find those cutters, how important is that to your offense?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: It is our offense. That's why we recruited this team. To have a 5 man who can shoot and to have one who can pass and then have positional size. Then you see Kylan's turned into a very, very good cutter. Tre White is. It's advantageous to have a guy like him.

You see somebody brought up Jokic, you see why Denver's so good. Really hard to guard that. He's just getting really back healthy and conditioning back. When he's shooting that basketball -- and he's probably our best shooter. When he's shooting the basketball like that, he's a hard guard.

Q. You mentioned Tre, one of the key components of that cutting offense. It seemed like he had a million points off cuts tonight. What's been the big change in him? Was it all just getting back from illness, this resurgence?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Yes. And I think it was -- it's so hard to explain without it sounding cliché or like an excuse. He felt awful for more than a week, ten days, and he missed games. It takes a minute to get back. You just don't get that back. All of a sudden, it's just really started clicking with him with the reps in practice.

He's one of the last ones in the gym every day. He's shooting the cover off of it in terms of practice. So I think



it's just finding the right energy to be able to do your work. It's paying off for him.

Q. Brad, you said you expected a high-level basketball game. Did you think we'd see one with 200 points and teams shoot a combined 46 from deep?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: That's always a possibility with Iowa. I think we're the two top scoring teams in the league. As these guys mentioned, we try to practice that way. We play 14-second shot clocks in practice most of the time. That fits us.

It was a little different than the first game, where we held them to a season low. But you know with Dix and you know with the two Sandforts that they are very, very capable of having one of those nights.

Unfortunately for us, we let them find some comfort early. I thought we were a little soft on the defensive side early.

Q. To follow up on that, it seemed like an old ABA Pacers game with the points being put up. Do you have concerns defensively?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: None. We've been guarding our tail off. We jumped a boatload of spots here.

Like I said, I felt great. Nobody shoots more midrange 2s than Iowa. I thought some were really well contested. You can't get any better guarded than the one right before the half. That's what really, really good players do. They make hard shots, and Payton made a boatload of them.

Q. Eight ties, ten lead changes in that first half, a bucket before halftime put you up four. Started the second half on a 12-7 run. Some of your thoughts as you're talking to your guys as halftime?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I didn't love him making that shot, to be honest, right before the half because then they have the ball right before the half. It's one of those unique positions where they get the ball twice before we touch it.

Again, you kind of -- we've been through it with Iowa for my eight years. Fran's teams are elite offensively. We've always had these type of dogfight games back and forth. I didn't expect anything else. And anything but that.

So it is what it is. It was a great game for the fans to watch. Fortunately, we came out on the right side of it today.

Q. Brad, what are you getting leadership-wise from Kylan and Tre, some of those older guys recently?

How has their voice changed?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: They've changed the whole dynamic of what our season looks like since the Duke game. It's showing off, it's my belief in them. It's helped every other player that's been through it. Kylan's made deep runs in postseason. His leadership, he's controlling a lot of the timeouts.

How many players take four points off the board? Kylan is an 85 percent free-throw shooter? How many players out there are going to say, hey, you need a little pick me up here, go make four free throws.

Now, KJ is also an 85 percent free-throw shooter, so you feel pretty good about that. Not many guys do that.

I think Kasparas is hurt, for Kylan being left off the all-defensive team was very genuine. I think it's the relationship those two have and the yin and yang they get going, but their leadership is huge.

Q. Coach, even without those four points, Kylan still set a new career high with 24, had 7 assists, 1 turnover. What did you like about him out there on the court and his confidence?

BRAD UNDERWOOD: Yeah, it's nice to see him make 3s. When we recruited him, before he went to Arizona, I thought he was a terrific shooter. For whatever reason, it's been some tough shooting for him. That opens a lot of things up when he's making that, but his strength, Tommy's passing, they read each other great.

Then I thought that, even though Payton got going, I thought Kylan's defense was pretty darn good on him for most of the game.

Q. Do you have a feel for or a feeling about just how close this team is to like peak form? I mean, it's just like a four-game sample size. I don't know if that's enough for you.

BRAD UNDERWOOD: I don't know. I think about that all the time. It's a great question. I think about what is that. I don't -- I think the shooting -- you know, we shot it better tonight. We've been shooting it pretty good. That's been the one thing. And we've cut our turnovers down a lot.

It seems like every game we've had one area that we've kind of just -- you know, last Iowa game we get outrebounded by them. I think we've had closer to getting to that ceiling where we're starting to play a little more 40 minutes than 35 or 32.

Yeah, I don't know, I think about that a lot, though. But I think we're headed in the right direction now that we're healthy.

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Iowa Hawkeyes

Fran McCaffery

Payton Sandfort

Josh Dix

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THE MODERATOR: Iowa has arrived. Coach, we'll ask you to make an opening statement.

FRAN McCAFFERY: I just want to begin by saying how proud I am of these guys, not only how they fought today, but how they fought all year long.

One of the best leaders I've ever been around in Payton Sandfort, and to watch him fight the way he did today and play the way he did just really speaks to his character. He's been banged up all year, as we know.

And Josh, so incredibly versatile, incredible stamina. Never complains about anything. Just keeps fighting.

And the way they stayed together through some adversity this year is something that makes me incredibly proud as a coach. Love these guys. I will miss coaching that guy right there. That's why we do it. Same with him. That's why we do it.

Q. Payton, this is kind of directed to you. Outstanding career at Iowa. You left it all on the floor today. I saw the tears. What's it been for you to play for Iowa?

PAYTON SANDFORT: It means a lot, man. I grew up in the state. I didn't really grow up an Iowa fan, but I know how much Iowa athletics mean to the state. I remember as a kid you walk around your neighborhood, and you see everybody's got Iowa flags, and they've got Iowa on the backboards.

It's the greatest honor of my life to be able to represent the black and gold, and that's why I gave it everything I did



every day. The chance to play for Coach and the chance to play with so many great Hawkeyes, it's the honor of my lifetime.

I wish I could repay this place as much as it gave to me, but I gave it everything I had.

Q. Payton, this is for you. What did it mean to be able to play these two years with your brother and the way your brother had grown as a player this year in particular, and the finale, to get a double-double to beat Nebraska?

PAYTON SANDFORT: Getting to play with him, it's one of the coolest things in the world. They did the Big Ten Network journey on us, and just seeing, watching that, how they put that together, that was so cool. That only gives a fraction of what it was really like.

We won a high school state championship together, and we thought that might be it. Then he blew up, and I'm trying to tell him to come to Iowa and come to Iowa. When he finally committed, Coach and a bunch of other people were trying to hide it from me because they knew I'd be too excited to practice that day. I found out, and I broke everybody down, and he finally told me.

Getting the chance to watch him grow from just a skinny kid when he got here who just wanted to play with his brother and play for the Hawkeyes and turned into a really, really good Big Ten player, I think it's one of the coolest things you can see as a big brother. Everybody in the room who has a brother knows that, knows how special it is to watch them grow up.

I hope he's twice the player that I am. I'm so proud of that kid. I'm so happy for my family and just knowing that we got the chance to do that is something we're going to remember forever. I'm sure we'll tell our kids someday about who was the better player and all the fun things we did together, but that is for another day.

Q. Brad Underwood was saying -- this is for both of you -- that the two of you scared him today and he thought the two of you could have beat Illinois by



yourselves. To know that and hear that, what's that mean to you guys? To know that you guys have this kind of respect from other teams.

JOSH DIX: Yeah, it means a lot, but we couldn't do it without everyone else on the team. Ladj and Evan, they freed us up for good looks throughout the game. Brock, Drew, Pryce, they gave us the ball on time and allowed us to score easy.

PAYTON SANDFORT: Top to bottom on this roster, we've got so many guys that have improved over the year. I'm so proud of everybody. Brock hits a big shot, and Drew's been great.

I want to give Josh his flowers. He's fought through a lot this year. This dude is going to be in the NBA someday. Watching him play and watching him grow since he got here, I feel like he's one of my lifelong brothers now. It's been special getting to play with him every day. I'm so proud of him.

Q. Josh and Payton, 54.9 from the field, 44.8 from deep, about all you could ask for, if I told you you were going to have 94 points, would you feel pretty good about that, and what made you so tough to stop?

JOSH DIX: If you told us that, we'd have thought we had a good chance to win, but they're a very versatile team. They go about ten deep. They've got guys that can play three or four positions. They make it tough to shoot and tough to guard. Especially the way they move the ball and share the ball, they don't really have selfish players. That's what makes them so hard to guard.

PAYTON SANDFORT: They just spread you out so much. They're just really well-coached. They've got a bunch of pros on that team.

We gave them all they could handle, but they made big time shots, and they got a ton of rebounds. That's going to make them a tough out. If they shoot like that, they can compete with anybody in the country.

Q. Fran, there's been a lot of speculation about your future, and frankly it's unavoidable. I just wanted to ask do you expect to be the coach of Iowa for next year and beyond?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I do.

Q. What did you do to get that first technical foul? Clearly you said something --

FRAN McCAFFERY: Not enough.

Q. What led up to it?

FRAN McCAFFERY: I want to answer your question, Mike. I like you some days. I think I might have pointed out the foul discrepancy. I think I said it was 5-1. I didn't think that was that egregious.

Q. Not commenting on the circumstances beyond the technical, but just the effect of your absence, you mentioned the emotion involved with Payton. Was there any wistfulness that you weren't able to be there when he was off the court?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Absolutely. I would want to be there, but I'm always going to advocate for my guys. That's my job, and I'm the only one who can do it. So I did it, and we had some very emotional moments in the locker room.

Q. Looking back on this season, what would you say to some of your favorite parts of coaching this group have been?

FRAN McCAFFERY: This is one of my favorite teams I've ever coached, and I mean that sincerely from a number of different perspectives. It starts with when you have some adversity, how do the other players respond? So it's a challenge for the coaching staff, it's a challenge for them. To watch Ladj and Evan in particular and see Riley play the way he did against Washington, but then also, when Drew was out to watch Brock and Pryce really thrive the way they have to get quality minutes out of Carter Kingsbury who came in as a walk-on and earned the scholarship.

It forces players into more responsibility, which as you know, is not easy in this league. We just played one of the most impressive teams that I've watched on film all year long. Brad does a great job every year, but I love this team that he has and how it came together. They had some issues with sickness in that one stretch, but they're coming together now with the pieces they can make a run.

So recognizing the challenge in this league night in and night out and watching our guys continue to fight despite quite a few setbacks. I'll mark earlier in the season when Payton and Josh were injured, and of course Payton's been banged up all year. So he just kept taping it up and playing. One of the toughest dudes I've ever been around.

So very proud of the leadership, very proud of the fight, very proud of the professionalism and focus of this group. It was awesome coming to work every day with these guys.

Q. You've made a couple references this week to the

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crown. Is this a viable option? Can this happen?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Oh, yeah, it's going to happen.

Q. It might be a little early for this, but following up on what Scott said, in terms of next season, what has to happen for Iowa basketball to do what you and the family want it to do to make a deeper run here and in the NCAA Tournament?

FRAN McCAFFERY: We could go on a long time answering that question. It's a different era. Used to be, okay, we graduated these three guys. Here's my recruiting class. Kind of look at it and say maybe want to sign a guy late. But we kind of know what our roster is going to look like today for next year. It's not like that anymore.

We've got quite a few seniors. We have a top 20 recruiting class. We feel like those guys can come in and contribute right away, four new guys there. Our sophomore class is really good. So really like that group. Can we add another player or two, three, who knows?

We are in a different world, as you know. That's why you asked me the question. We have guys that might be offered seven-figure deals, which will challenge their thought process. If you were 21 and somebody called you up and said they'd come play for me for a million five, you might think about it. So we're dealing with that, or we will deal with that.

But it's a close-knit group. Our coaching staff has a great relationship with our guys. I fully anticipate those guys coming back and playing for us.

Q. Fran, what do you need resources-wise to be competitive to compete for a Big Ten Championship? Do you have everything you need infrastructure-wise in order to do so each and every year?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Scott, I think the numbers this year, you'd probably need 6 million, and we were nowhere near that. I think you know that. Those numbers are going to go north of that.

Now, when the settlement is completed and the rev share number is what it is, we'll know what that is, but I think it's safe to say the collectives aren't going away. Those are the numbers that exist already, so we can only imagine those going up.

Q. Drew Thelwell said you gave him the confidence that he could play professionally. How did you convince him of that?

FRAN McCAFFERY: Truthfully, it's not that hard. That kid can play. He's talented. He's smart. He's tough. He has character. He's got all the qualities you need. I'm really impressed, he was a great college -- not a good college, a great college player, but he wanted to prove himself at this level.

It would have been great to see him if he'd have been healthy all year long because that ankle injury did really set him back for three, four weeks. Boy, he was great today, and he's been great ever since he came back.

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