

# Big 12 Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 11, 2017

**Steve Prohm**  
**Deonte Burton**  
**Nazareth Mitrou-Long**  
**Matt Thomas**  
**Monte Morris**  
Iowa State

Iowa State - 80, West Virginia - 74

THE MODERATOR: We are ready to begin with our championship team, the Iowa State Cyclones, Coach Steve Prohm, and he brought just about everybody tonight, Monte Morris, Nazareth Mitrou-Long, Matt Thomas and Deonte Burton. Coach, congratulations today.

STEVE PROHM: Thank you. This is an amazing moment, for our program, our university, these seniors. To win 3 out of 4 conference tournaments, my hats off to these guys. That's unbelievable. I'm extremely proud of them. We beat a really good team tonight.

They provided us a lot of match-up issues, and our toughness and our grit had to be at a high level tonight and we challenged our guys defensively. We had given points up in the 80s and 90s the last two times we played them, and we were good enough defensively tonight to win. Tough enough to win.

I couldn't be more proud of them. These four guys, I told them this summer, we met a lot, about once a week and just talked about, you know, they'd had such a great run and we had lost a lot of good pieces. I didn't want this to come back a little bit this year. The challenge to them was to leave their jersey in a better place. They've done a great job of that. There is more story to write. That's what I told them in the locker room. Stay humble. Do the right thing, and let's get ready for next week. This moment is special and without these four guys and their character and their leadership we wouldn't be here.



**Q. What's it like playing a home game in Kansas City three hours from campus?**

NAZARETH MITROU-LONG: We call it Hilton South for a reason. It's a blessing, because us guys up here we didn't have our senior night two weeks. We had another home game here tonight, yesterday, and the night before. It's an advantage when you have the best fan base in the country willing to travel through rain, sleet, snow, doesn't matter and come out to support us and will us to this win. It's a blessing.

**Q. Monte' and Deonte, Coach said that he told you in the locker room there is more story to write. What do you do after such a high moment like this to make sure this isn't the climax, the peak for you guys?**

DEONTE BURTON: By taking this win and building from it. We can't be complacent. We have to be as hungry as we was coming here. That's the biggest thing, just not losing the "want" to win, the "will" to win.

MONTÉ MORRIS: Yeah, and touching on what he said, two years ago we won this same tournament and the next week our lives was miserable. We lost to UAB first round, so that's definitely in our seniors' heads. Deonte wasn't there, but he knows the feeling. He knows how it feels to lose especially in that magnitude of a game. We just got to keep everyone together. That's our job, us being seniors, so we are definitely going to do that. Like Coach said, there is more work to be done. So we're going to step up to the challenge.

**Q. Monte', what's it like being in the shooting zone that you were in toward the end of the first half?**

MONTÉ MORRIS: I mean, I take my hat off to my coaching staff and these guys next to me and every guy in that locker room, giving me the confidence and the confidence again to shoot the ball, telling me to keep being aggressive because that's when we are at our best. When I'm attacking and guys are in great rhythm. So, like I said, I was able to get in that zone because my teammates found me and gave me the trust to go out there and be successful.

**Q. Monte', at the beginning of this news conference it was mentioned that this is Iowa State's third championship in the last four years. To you, what does this mean to win one for Coach Prohm for the first time?**

MONTÉ MORRIS: That guy had so much adversity on his shoulders before we left and everybody was giving him a hard time when we would lose games, but he came to work every day and started to turn things around. I think that's when the face of the program turned. Fred had a great run here, but everybody knows Fred probably won't come back.

So it's his show, and once he stepped up to the plate we definitely have turned this Iowa State season around and getting a chance to win for Coach Prohm is big-time, especially on his son's birthday, Cass. So we got that win tonight for his son and Cyclone Nation.

DEONTE BURTON: Shout out to Cass.

**Q. Matt and Naz, can you guys discuss the way that you stayed aggressive in the second half? West Virginia got it to 5 at one point in the last few minutes and you still continued to push it and maybe how important that was in closing this out?**

MATT THOMAS: Yeah, I think we play at our best when we stay aggressive. When you build an 8-10 point lead with 10 or 12 minutes left you can't get complacent especially with a team like West Virginia because they're going to keep coming and coming. We were able to keep attacking and break the press and guys were able to finish at the rim and knock down shots late.

NAZARETH MITROU-LONG: He said everything. We were executing plays and Monte' was handling pressure all night, and Matt was handling threes. I couldn't hit a lick and I kept looking at my teammates and everybody was pumping me up. That's when I felt secure that we'd be fine down the stretch. They have the best press in the country, and we handled it the right way tonight. That's why we can call ourselves champions.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, you can go back to the locker room. Good job this week. Look forward to watching you next week. Questions for Coach?

**Q. Coach, yesterday we talked about the spark that Deonte provided both halves, tonight didn't do much in the first half but 10 points quickly in the second half, talk about his spark?**

STEVE PROHM: He was big for us. I thought he struggled in the game up at West Virginia a week ago and assistants met with him and I met with him. I thought that was the one game in our run where he took a step back when he had been playing so well and so efficient for us. He's done a great job of changing to becoming a good shooter.

But he drove it. We had him in the middle to make

plays and drive some bigger guys. There was one or two or three times he forced it, but for the course of the game he made really good decisions for us. He was big. He had no rebounds up there. Tonight he had 5. Then he gets 16 points and he was really active and physical. Happy for him because he's made a lot of changes.

**Q. Steve, you heard what Monte' had to say about you and succeeding Fred. What were your thoughts as he was speaking to that? What does this championship mean personally to you?**

STEVE PROHM: Well Monte' is great, you know. You win with great players. I was very fortunate to come in and walk into him being our point guard, and Fred did an amazing job putting this program back at an elite level. Replacing him, it's not easy. It wasn't easy. A lot tougher than I probably would have ever imagined, coming here.

But I think it's helped make me a better coach, and I think what Monte' said is right. There was times I tried to assert myself and times I tried to take a step back, and I think this team is better when I'm assertive and in command and letting these guys make plays out of that.

I'm happy for these guys. Like I said, it's about the players and you win with great players. But it means a lot because, you know, you don't want to let anybody down. We've got great seniors. I think they -- like I said, we've got a lot more to play for and I'm glad they're talking about that because we've got to go focused next week whether you are a 4, 5, 6. We've got to be locked in because we want to try to make a great run.

But it means a lot. It means a lot for my family. Everybody has to make sacrifices when you take a new job, and this is a special place and a special job and I'm very fortunate to be here.

**Q. Steve, your depth came through tonight and that's pretty important when you play three games in three days. But moving forward you don't have that kind of situation in the NCAA Tournament. How do you feel like the roster make-up that you have can translate to success at those next rounds?**

STEVE PROHM: I played our starters extended minutes in the first two games for stretches. I know Monte' was able to get some rest last night because of the lead. But I think when you get into the championship round and the next day, you know, your bench has to be really good for you.

Nick Weiler-Babb, Darrell and Donovan were terrific.

We've shortened our bench a little bit. I've got a better feel for rotations, but those guys, they produce. If they produce they're going to continue to play. The great thing about them playing well tonight is they go into the NCAA Tournament with a lot of confidence and a lot of "pop" to them. Our starters believe in them.

So, you know, our chemistry is very good right now because everybody is pulling for one another even when they're not playing and when you've got that going to on then you can do special things because people are submitting to what's best and being selfless.

**Q. Coach, last year it was an early exit. This year, can you share your thoughts about the three-day sampling of the Cyclone Nation here in Kansas City?**

STEVE PROHM: Last year, I know we were in the 3-6 game, the late game and we didn't get off to a great start. We struggled against Oklahoma in the way they were guarding us, and Niang put on an unbelievable second half performance and we missed a corner three to get it to one. But the crowd that night was amazing. The fan base that night was amazing.

Then they went and followed us in the NCAA Tournament to Chicago. It was packed. Our fan base is amazing. They're all over the hotel all week, but they're resilient, too, to where they keep coming back. I've said it a million times since I've been here, I've been blown away every single night regardless of who we play we have 14,380 I think it is that fill Hilton Coliseum for a Citadel, for Cincinnati or for Kansas, it's the same group with the same energy.

Then you come down here tonight, and I don't know how much the Sprint Center holds, it was probably 9/10 red, and that's amazing. It's huge! Obviously, it helps a ton when you've got the crowd behind you like that. It's a special fan base. You just look around and put on the TV. It's just not like that everywhere, and that's why this is a special job.

**Q. We're constantly told that these title games in big conferences don't mean a lot. In a lot of cases, you're both going to next week. But it was really fun to be in there and guys played really hard. I wonder what you think were sort of the factors behind that?**

STEVE PROHM: You know, these things mean a lot because you're playing for championships. The way those two teams competed, there was a lot on the line tonight. The difference in a game tonight, you know, we outrebounded them. I was looking at the stats right now. We were +4 and -2 on the free throw line. We didn't shoot it great from three tonight. Naz had a lot of good lucks, he's 0-5. Monte' is 1 for 7.

But the toughness and the grit those stats and then the goal was 10 turnovers or less, but if you're in that 12, 13 range, that's huge. We were 13 turnovers, +4 rebounding only -2 free throws. That was the key to the game. When we didn't get frustrated, we cracked up there. We reverted back in Morgantown a week ago, which was good for us in a way because when I got back I could talk to those guys and tell them, hey, we reverted back to our old way. They understood that and recognized that as well, with the bad shots, playing the wrong way.

So when we got stuck on 6 and it's 12-6 or whatever it was, 14-6, we stayed the course tonight. We didn't splinter. We kept defending. We kept defending. Our defensive effort in the first half gave us a great opportunity to win.

THE MODERATOR: All right, Coach. We'll let you go back. Congratulations.