

# Big Ten Basketball Media Days

Thursday, October 7, 2021

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

## Nebraska Cornhuskers

Men's Head Coach

## Fred Hoiberg



FRED HOIBERG: Good morning. It's great to be back in front of people. My daughter actually works for the Big Ten Network. Kevin, I am thankful for your leadership and commitment to excellence. She loves it. She loves the culture of the Big Ten Network, certainly excited to be there.

Just want to talk a little bit first of all about our team. I'm really excited about our group this year. For the first time since we've been at Nebraska, we have a continuity with our lineup. We bring back players that played a key factor in our team and in our system, are going to provide or are providing great leadership to our young talented class that we brought in with our new commerce, four freshmen and four transfers that we've added to our lineup.

To have continuity is very important. We basically started with the ground up with our first two seasons. We took over a big rebuilding project in a league where we were the only team that was really going through a rebuild, created some very difficult moments. But I'm proud, especially last year's group, of how we fought through adversity. We were hit by the pandemic and by COVID as much as any team in the country a year ago where we were shut down for 21 days with 10 of our rotation players that came down with it, four of our coaches. I was really proud of putting a schedule, talking to Kerry Kenny, about how we basically put together 14 games in 29 days. With deconditioned bodies, having to stay out of the gym because of everything that was going on with our group.

A lot of those guys that went through that found a way through to fight through that adversity, they've been important in our early stages of helping our young players along, talking to them about the system, when you do it right, when we share the ball, make simple plays, about how effective it can be.

Our young class, top 15 class in the country, I have been really impressed with the maturity of our group. Excited about the uniqueness of the skill set of our roster. I think we're going to have a group that comes in and competes. Every year it's been the thing that I've enjoyed most about

our team, walking into the gym every day knowing it's a team that's going to compete and gives an effort every time they step on the floor.

With that, it's great to be back and open it up to questions.

**Q. I know you want to build a program, you're focused on that. Any sentimental thoughts about being back in Indianapolis from your playing days, any thoughts about your Pacers days?**

FRED HOIBERG: I love coming back to Indianapolis. Got my opportunity. When I walked in, saw a picture of Mel Daniels, which is really the guy that drafted me. See him up in the rafters here. Just such a great mentor to me when I came in here. Just don't want shake his hand or didn't want to shake his hand, it will take you to your knees. Mel was one of the all-time great people. Just loved what he did for me as a young player. To see Reggie Miller's name up there. Roger Brown, Slick Leonard, to see his picture, such a great person and a guy that I a lot of wonderful times with.

But my first two kids were born in Indianapolis. We played at the old Market Square Arena, some of the best atmospheres, going through those great series with the Knicks, with the Bulls. Had a chance to beat them in the Last Dance in that Game 7 where we had them down pretty good in the second half.

Always have great memories of this place. We loved it here. We loved our time. Such a passionate fan base, especially for basketball. Certainly a place that any time I come here, I'll try to go back by our old house. We have four awesome, awesome years in Indianapolis.

**Q. You mentioned trying to rebuild in a conference like this is always extremely difficult. You were able to get four transfers out of the portal this year. Last year was an active time for everybody coming and going. How do you deal with your roster management through this? Do you expect that to continue at that level going forward or no?**

FRED HOIBERG: Yeah, I think it absolutely will continue.



I think you may see it even increase just based on the rule that was passed last year where transfers don't have to sit anymore as a one-time transfer. It's really how we built our program.

When I first got into coaching at Iowa State, we brought four high-level transfers at that year. At that time they had to sit. With the talent we added to our lineup, it got up to four consecutive NCAA tournaments, two Big 12 tournament championships. It's just a way we were able to increase the talent on our roster and get it turned over very quickly.

You're going to see that a lot. I think what we have now is a very good mix of transfer, older and younger players. Getting a guy like Alonzo Verge late in the game with Dalano Banton, kept his name in the draft, was so important to get another player to give us depth in the backcourt, somebody that can play with the ball in their hands, a guy that can get into the paint and make plays.

C.J. Wilcher, Keon Edwards, Keisei Tominaga, the other three that can space the floor, guys that can knock down shots and make plays.

The biggest area I think of improvement for our team is perimeter shooting, also play making. When you have that shooting, especially in the world of analytics, taking away the three-point line, it opens up driving lanes. We had a shot profile last year that we want to continue with, 82% of our shots were in the restricted area, behind the three-point line.

We feel we're much better equipped now to take advantage of those situations, hopefully knock down those shots, finish better at the rim. If we do that, we'll take a huge step in the right direction on the offensive end of the floor.

**Q. You've mentioned narrowing down the rotation with the returning players you have, the newcomers, is going to be one of the most difficult tasks. What is a realistic number you want to ultimately get that rotation down to? How do you balance egos a little bit?**

FRED HOIBERG: That's a great question. It is going to be my single most difficult part of the job this year, is figuring out a rotation, who starts, and more importantly who finishes games, who we can trust in those late-game situations.

The biggest thing you have to express to your team is role acceptance, going out there whatever role you're given, star in it. We got three weeks to figure it out. What we

start with with a rotation may not be what we finish the year with. We're doing our best to put the best players on the floor, the best five that fit together to give us the best chance to win. That's ultimately the goal.

Coming from a guy that played every role, from being a bench guy, behind-the-bench guy, a starter, to go out there and accept it, do the best job you can, take advantage of the minutes when they come and also practice situations.

Again, that creates great competitiveness in your practices. I've been impressed with our group for the way they've gone out and are fighting for those very valuable minutes.

We have I think 12 that I can put on the floor right now in certain situations. At the beginning of the year we'll start probably nine or 10 in a rotation and probably go from there.

**Q. Obviously not a ton of on-court progress is going to take place at an event like this. Perception matters to some extent. What can you train Alonzo to get accomplished today?**

FRED HOIBERG: I don't know. I guess the best thing about an event like today is to have some normalcy back in our lives, hopefully carry that over throughout the season.

Still understanding that we are living in a pandemic. I'm proud of our group for buying into being 100% fully vaccinated with our group. But we're still taking it cautious. Every day we've had players that wake up with the sniffles, we keep them away, get them COVID tested. Thankfully we have not had a positive case to this point.

I think an event like today just brings some normalcy back to our lives in the world we live in. Hopefully we can continue through that. I know all of us as coaches and players are excited about getting fans back in our building. We feel we have a great home-court advantage. Our fans have been extremely patient throughout the rebuild that we've had. I know they're excited about this group.

For Trey, Alonzo and myself to come out here and talk about the group and the strides that we've made, where we are as a program, gives us a great platform certainly to do that.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports