

NCAA Men's Frozen Four Semifinal: St. Cloud State vs Minnesota State

Thursday, April 8, 2021

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

PPG Paints Arena

St. Cloud State Huskies

Coach Brett Larson

Postgame Media Conference



St. Cloud State - 5, Minnesota State - 4

MODERATOR: We have coach Brett Larson with us.
Opening thoughts on the game?

COACH LARSON: Sure, obviously we're excited right now. But it was a man's game. It was a battle. And certainly played against a great team tonight.

MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Can you talk about kind of the changes you had to make with Brodzinski's injury and Kupka being such a big player on that first line with Walker and Miller, and obviously Molenaar jumping into the lineup on that fourth-line spot and you get the big goal as well.

COACH LARSON: Fortunately I thought Kupka held his own on that line. He was able to play his game. He didn't try to change his game. And that's what we asked out of him. And Molenaar went into a huge game after not playing for a while and came up big for us. So obviously having those two players fill the roles we needed really helped.

Q. How is your heart? And just describe, I guess, the ups and downs of that game and trying to (indiscernible) because so many momentum swings.

COACH LARSON: Felt like we had to play a little rope-a-dope tonight. I thought Mankato played really well. They played really heavy. We had trouble breaking pucks out and maintaining offensive zone time for extended periods. Fortunately we were opportunistic tonight. When we got a chance we were able to bury it.

But I thought for a lot of the game they really controlled, they really controlled the puck possession and controlled

the momentum of the game.

Q. What's the message to the boys on the bench when they score the fourth goal to take the lead?

COACH LARSON: Well, we just talked about continuing to believe in what we had built. And that that's what we have to fall back on. We've got to stay and trust our structure, trust our game. And that was kind of the message on the bench. It's been a consistent message for a while now. And I think the guys believe in it and they stuck with it.

Q. In the third period, was that -- end up being your best period just in terms of you guys playing your game?

COACH LARSON: It was. We finally found a little bit of life. Even a couple of shifts before Molenaar scored I felt we were getting some jump back in our legs and able to push the pace a little bit more and get up on the forecheck a little bit more. But until then, I thought they really controlled the areas that they wanted to control and it was really difficult for us.

So like I said, fortunately tonight I thought our players came through at opportunistic times because Mankato made it, it was a man's game. And they played a man's game and they made the ice very difficult out there. And like I said, I was happy that we were just able to convert when we did finally get a chance.

Q. So I know that obviously at this point everyone has a sort of next-man-up mentality. But what do you think about the job that your fourth line, as they're listed on the sheet, did tonight?

COACH LARSON: It's funny what you just said, "as they're listed on the sheet." A lot of people call them our fourth line. But really the way our team is built, we think we have four first lines. They just play differently.

And the value that Hammer's line brings every night, no matter who is on it, has been one of the main parts of our success this year. And obviously they scored two goals tonight and came through in a big way.

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Q. I feel I've talked to you a lot about Nolan Walker in the last few weeks. Another opportunity to talk about him. First of all who taught him that deflection? Second of all, all the talk that you've said all year about how he's become a different player, is it sort of just on instinct now, gotten to the point where it's just starting to finally come naturally to him?

COACH LARSON: You're right. I think he's really trusting in how he needs to play. And he's seeing the rewards for it. As a coach, there's certain guys -- well, you're proud of your whole team -- but when you see a guy really push his game to the next level through work and effort and becoming a better 200-foot player and winning more battles and things that we've just really needed them to do, you know, you feel proud because he's put in the effort and he cares about his teammates enough to do it.

And I'm really happy for Nolan because he, it was a guy that we needed to make a step and he put in the work to do it.

Q. Brett, last season you guys finished under .500. Now you're going to be playing for a national championship. You don't look as excited as I think you are. Just describe your emotions here as you're getting ready now for this.

COACH LARSON: Last year didn't end. We never finished it. So who knows where we could ended up. We had a great group of guys that I thought really pushed this program to get better through a year when we lost 16 guys. Our senior group last year was a huge character group they didn't get a chance to finish it.

I think what they did was help build the foundation for this group. And this group is built off of that. And I can't thank those guys enough, because they willed it through a tough year last year. And I think the lessons that they left has helped this team grow.

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